

# BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

ROBERT BROWNING, CENTENNIAL MONOGRAPH	...	1912
ROBERT BROWNING, THE POET AND THE MAN...	...	1923
ROBERT BROWNING, POET AND PHILOSOPHER...	...	1923
ROBERT BROWNING, POET AND PHILOSOPHER, <i>2nd Edition, with Introduction</i>	... ..	1925

Robert Browning  
and  
Elizabeth Barrett

BY

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## CHAPTER I.

"Few poets were so mated before," wrote Francis Thompson of Shelley and Mary Shelley, "and no poet so mated afterwards until Browning stooped and picked up a fair-coined soul that lay rusting in a pool of tears."

"It was," says Mr. Sharpe, who knew Browning intimately in late life, "as though his sterling nature rang in his genially dominant voice, and again, as though his voice transmitted instantaneous waves of an electric current through every nerve of what, for want of a better phrase, I must perforce call his intensely alive hand . . . he possessed a rare quality of physical magnetism; by virtue of this he could either attract irresistibly or strongly repel."—*Life of Browning*.

"The face of all the world is changed, I think,  
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul  
Move still, oh, still, beside me; as they stole  
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink  
Of obvious death, where I who thought to sink  
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole  
Of life in a new rhythm."

*7th Sonnet "From the Portuguese."*

We find on reading the "Correspondence of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett" that the lady was not so jealously secluded, nor so drowned in tears as in the miserable year for Francis Thompson when he wrote his now famous Essay which was doomed to remain in his desk, rejected of Editors, for seventeen years.

At the beginning of the visiting of Browning, the poetess has to apologize to the half offended man for saying as she did the day before that she would not go out at the time appointed for his coming if she could help it.

If it were necessary for her to go out every day it would be otherwise, "but as it is I could certainly keep the day you come."

She does not go out if storms are threatening, she has a not unreasonable terror of thunderstorms, left by the fact of a great storm in Herefordshire, where storms do congregate (such storms) round the foot of the Malvern Hills.

"We lived there in a Turkish house my father built himself," she explains, "crowded with minarets and domes, crowned with metal spires and crescents, to the provocation (as people used to observe) of every lightning of heaven."

"Our family name is *Moulton-Barrett*, and my brothers reproach me sometimes for sacrificing the governorship of an old town in Norfolk with a little honourable verdigris from the Heralds' Office. As if I cared for the Retrospective Review! Nevertheless it is true that I would give ten towns in Norfolk (if I had them) to own some purer lineage than that of the blood of the slave! Cursed we are from generation to generation! I seem to hear the 'Commination Service.'"—Friday, 21st December, 1845.

The biographers tell us that Edward Barrett Moulton was left a legacy by his maternal grandfather, after whom the Christian name Barrett was given. The legacy from his grandfather carried the condition of adding his name of Barrett after the Moulton. He was sent to England very young as ward of Lord Abinger, then Mr. Scarlett. He never returned to Jamaica.

Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett was married young to Mary Graham Clarke, of Newcastle-on-Tyne; Elizabeth, the first of their children, was the first child born to the Barrett family in England for generations. Her mother faded out of life when she was twenty-two years of age.

"In the early days of his marriage Mr. Barrett was an earnest social worker; he held meetings at Ledbury for the untaught people when, at this period, a man of wealth to concern himself in social betterment was almost unknown. He was the friend of the unfriended poor, and by his side with wondering upturned eyes was the little Elizabeth, an ardent and sympathetic companion." *Lilian Whiting*—

"*The Brownings, their Mind and Art.*"

When the Bill for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies passed into force, Edward Barrett became comparatively poor; the great house at Hope End was sold, the home was transferred to the ramshackle place at Sidmouth, selected for its size which would hold the now large family.

The father was resentful, gloomily vituperative, asserting that "the West Indies are irreparably ruined by the passing of the Bill . . . they had better hang weights to the sides of the Island of Jamaica and sink it."

Perhaps Elizabeth alone divined the pain of her father, when the Bill was dividing society around them.

She writes to her friend Mrs. Martin that her father is very unhappy about something.

*"Painful circumstances produce different effects upon different minds; and some feeling with which I certainly have no sympathy has made papa shrink from society of any kind lately. He would not even attend the religious societies of Ledbury, which he was so much pledged to support and so interested in supporting."*

Perhaps in writing the last of her "Poems Before Congress," her last work, Mrs. Browning, looking down the vista of years, saw the altruistic father, and the happy child entering into his work, and the splendid home and the contrast of the years.

What did she mean by her "Curse to a Nation?" wrote her puzzled friends in England.

What did she mean by the curse sent over the Western Sea? said angry America.

For the curse the Missionary Society were demanding to be sent over the sea came back over the sea, perhaps to the days when England's sea heroes, centuries before, sailed with their profitable cargoes of slaves as legitimate merchandise.

Her friend Kate Field asked to be allowed to attempt justification of the poem.

Mrs. Browning replied "that even kind words are not always best spoken."

Did she in the later years, in the light of knowledge the years bring, ask herself questions of the why and wherefore of things in the puzzle of her father's mood of resentment to visitors. What was the reason for his shielding himself behind his ring of children from society around.

Why, she may have pondered, did he leave Cambridge without completing his course? What were the conditions of his school life at Harrow?

Was Browning "carrying out her wishes" when he determined *not* to send their boy to a public school. "He himself supervised his education and prepared him for the University."—*Life of Browning, Mrs. Orr.*

It is a curious fact that in the Browning family there was the reduction of income by the passing of the Bill for the Abolition of Slavery. The grandfather of the poet married Margaret Tittle, a West Indian, whose income was lessened by the Act. On her death he married again, and, presumed to be from jealousy, the second wife banished the portrait of the first to an attic.

The theme of his grandmother's banished portrait was indignantly discussed in the Browning family circle of Camberwell, and on the death of the grandfather the son claimed it and gave it place of honour in his home.

The portrait is now in the Museum of the Browning Settlement at Walworth.

To a correspondent, a friend of Miss Mitford, three years before meeting Browning, Elizabeth wrote that "she felt a little ashamed of being alive. According to Plato, I should have been put to death long ago as a chronic patient. It seems to me that everybody must be tired hearing of me—and that to lie so long ill without dying is a decided case of black letter in the body. I begin to understand that it may be God's will (who has caused me to survive much trial of body and mental agonies without a name) to keep me in the world to watch and wait, and perhaps work, far, far longer once (and that not so very long ago), I could have believed either possible or endurable."

This correspondent wishing for her opinion had submitted his pamphlet on "Predestination and Election considered spiritually" for her criticism.

She replied in three long letters which were published later in booklet form as "The Religious Opinions of Elizabeth Barrett."

In the correspondence with Browning she relates her difficulty with her correspondents who would like to make visits to her. She has "to play Mr. Chorley off against Mr. Horne, and Mr. Horne against Mr. Chorley and the world with these two."

Consent was given by her father to receive Browning after her four months' correspondence with him. She confided to her father, after his first visit that "the meeting strangely affected her."

"It was her father's opinion," she wrote, "that her obstinacy and dry toast had brought her to her present condition, and if I *pleased* to have porter and beefsteak instead I should be as well as ever in a month."

But, so far as this correspondence discloses, the porter and beefsteak were not forced upon her.

Her poet replies that he does not like her opium taking.

She answers that the medical men consider opium a necessity to give the right composure and point of balance to the nervous system—you must not think it is taken for "my spirits."

To add to her spinal weakness she had broken a blood vessel once, to recover from which she had the three years' visit to her aunt at Torquay—and then came the tragedy of her brother's drowning: to illustrate her state of mind at one time she refers him to "King's Memoirs," and his

prayer, "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul."

In return for his remark on her health, she advises him, who, she understands, abstains habitually from wine to take some for his health's sake. For her part strong coffee always delivered her from a headache.

She gives him the gossip of him brought home by her brother as "the newest news," from someone who knows Mr. Browning, intimate friends of his, that he is engaged to a Miss Campbell, an heiress.

He takes the matter seriously—would track the falsehood to its source.

He writes of his method of answering foolish questions.

"My friend the Countess began proceedings by asking if I had got as much money as I expected by any works published of late."

To which I answered of course.

"Exactly as much."

She tells him they are famous in this house for what are called nick names: "Mr. Kenyon says I am just half a Ba-by, no more nor less, and in fact the name has that precise definition."

A good deal of apparently obscure correspondence revolves round the gifts of rings.

She knows hers will not fit him but it can be altered. She cannot go far into the outer world and has to take what is nearest—her uncle's gift. That it was the colour of his blue flowers decided it. She has sent it to a jeweller to have the hair put in; there has been delay in getting it off. She had no suitable silk. When it arrives she is agitated, the hair gets tangled. It is thrown in the fire, "and all the hair might have followed, for I was losing my temper and my patience fast."

He answers that "he will live and die with her beautiful ring with its beautiful hair comforting and blessing him."

She makes merry at one of her medical advisers who gravely thought poetry "a sort of disease and that nobody could be properly well who exercised it . . . true, even of men, but for women a mortal malady. He thinks he has done everything for me because he has carried the inkstand out of the room."

But she declares that "the word literature has, with me, covered a good deal of liberty as you may see, real liberty which is never inquired into."

She places her real knowledge of his love when he wrote



that he cared for her, "not for a reason but because he cared for her."

"Which reasonable people would take to be irrational," she adds.

Just here doubtless she took up her pen and wrote the 14th "Sonnet from the Portuguese."

"I rest on you, for life, for death, beloved—you do stand in my solemn belief, the direct miraculous gift of God to me—that is my solemn belief, may I be thankful," he writes.

"This," she replies, "is an ungainly absurdity—but I exclaim to myself about the miracle of it far more even than you do—it seems to me still a dream how you came here at all—the very machinery of it seems miraculous. Why did I receive you and only you? Can I tell? No, not a word."

She asks for a copy of "Pauline."

He temporises. There are misprints, and he would like to tell her the history of it, what it is necessary she should know. He would rather show her much earlier work, his first love was Ossian.

He wrote a poem around him at five years of age.

His childish effusion was kept under the cushion of an armchair.

"My first were kept between the mattresses of my crib," she replies.

"My poetry is far from completest expression of my being," he writes. "I hate to refer to it or I could tell you why—wherefore—prove to you how unsatisfactory it must of necessity be."

"The Chrism is on thine head," says the 3rd "Sonnet from the Portuguese," in answer to herself.

To him she writes in the cold of prose.

"There are things you say which seem to me supernatural, for reasons which I know and reasons which I don't know."

Good Cousin Kenyon breaks in with practical words.

"Does Mrs. Jameson know that Mr. Browning comes here?"

"No," said I.

"Well then! I advise you to give directions to the servants that when she or anyone else asks for you, they should not say, '*Mr. Browning is with you*' as they said the other day to Miss Bayley."

She confides to him the grumblings in the house because they do not have a carriage, and her defence. "People who have had reverses are nervous of spending money. Papa has not kept a carriage since I have been grown up."

He has to allay her anxiety about his visits to her becoming known through him.

He answers that the three persons whom he has spoken to about it, his father and mother and sister, know the necessity for the absolute silence enjoined. He tells her that they are frequenters of the Independent Dissenting Chapel, too, "where they took me this morning and I heard a sermon preached by the very minister who officiated at my baptism."

He tells her that he forgets his verses as soon as they are on paper and off his mind.

She tells him of their going to see the Birmingham train, the wonder of the day, "a great blind mole it looked for blackness—we got out of the carriage to see closer. Flush was frightened, and it rained and raindrops were on my face and gown, which pleased me nearly as much as the railroad sight."

She is shy by nature, she confides, as well as her bad health.

She has not seen Captain Surtees-Cook yet, who is their cousin and engaged secretly to Henrietta.

She has been visiting some friends of Henrietta.

"The children of the family who could speak said that Flush was 'very cool' for walking upstairs without being asked."

One of her visits in the last days is to Westminster Abbey.

The music affected her profoundly, and the sight of it all, "so grand, as if time were turned to stone." She stood where the poets were laid.

Did her emotion prevision the time when he whom she loved would be brought to lie with his peers, to the chanting of her own hymn.

"He giveth his beloved sleep."

"What are you writing?" wrote Browning to Miss Barrett during the correspondence.

"Did Paul work at his tent-making after his vision?" is the evasive reply. "Does not Solomon say that there is a time to read what is written? But you shall see some day at Pisa, what I will not show you now."

## CHAPTER II.

In letters to Miss Barrett of 1846 his family history is related by Browning :

" My father is tender-hearted to a fault . . . to all women and children he is chivalrous. . . . If we are poor it is to my father's infinite glory, who, as my mother told me last night as we sate alone, conceived such a hatred of the slave system in the West Indies (where his mother was born, who died in his infancy), that he relinquished every prospect—supported himself while there, in some other capacity, and came back, while yet a boy, to his father's profound astonishment and rage—one proof of which was, that when he heard that his son was a suitor to her, my mother, he benevolently waited on her uncle to assure him that his niece would be thrown away on a man so evidently born to be hanged. My father on his return had the intention of devoting himself to art, for which he had many qualifications and abundant love ; but the quarrel with his father—who married again and continued to hate him, till a few years before his death—induced him to go at once and consume his life after a fashion he always detested."

" The Browning family," Mrs. Orr writes in her preface to the fifth edition of her " Handbook," " connect themselves by their coat of arms to the Captain Micaiah Browning who raised the siege of Derry in 1689 by springing the boom across Lough Foyle, and perished in the act. Another probable ancestor is the Captain Browning who commanded the ship *Holy Ghost*, which conveyed Henry V. to France before he fought the Battle of Agincourt ; and in return for whose services two waves, said to represent waves of the sea, were added to the coat of arms. The same arms were worn by Captain Micaiah Browning, and are those of the present family."

Mrs. Orr's preface was supervised by Browning. " Consciously and of set purpose the boy was shaped to be a poet by his father and his father's rare collection of books."—*Mrs. Orr's " Life of Browning."*

In the poem " Development " is pictured the father of the poet introducing the five-year-old child to the great poets of Greece, the tale of Troy traversed to feed the imagination

of the child. In late life Browning reverted to the Greek classics as material for his art: "My father was a scholar and knew Greek," Browning records in this poem of "Development." He recalls the lessons at the knee of his father; his wise method of instruction by giving him the tale of Troy as a real thing instead of, what he had to find out for himself afterwards, but a shadow of Epic life thrown by imagination.

So his father left him to sift and sort for the truth, he says at conclusion of the poem

"thanks to that instructor sage  
My father, who knew better than turn straight  
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance."

"Robert Browning the father had handled the same subjects as his son. He had written verse upon the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin; this he destroyed when he knew his son had done so also. He cast the story of the medieval poet Sordello into a poem, the summary of which is extant."—*"Life of Browning," W. Hall Griffin.*

The life of the German scientist and Christian apologist with nom-de-plume "Paracelsus"—"I am greater than Celsus, I am Paracelsus," was familiar to the elder Browning, "but of his son's rendering of it he could make nothing till towards the end of his life."

"*Life of Browning,*" William Sharp.

To this son his mother was a "divine woman" of paramount influence in his childhood. The father was remarkable for the humanitarianism which compelled him to give up life in the West Indies on his mother's property because he could not bear to see the cruelties practised to slaves, steadily pursuing the monotonous task of a bank official. With talent calling to Art's expression, and intellect bound to his books or rare erudition, he cheerfully resigned his own self expression to his son's genius.

Of childlike simplicity and utter unworldliness, the father was, with the son, in happy slavery to the mother. The father Anglican trained, the mother a dissenter. Together they worshipped at York Place Independent Chapel.

Of his mother Browning wrote to Miss Barrett that the connexion between them was no fanciful thing. They joyed and suffered together. He was heir to her delicate nervous system, to her passionately religious temperament, to her musician's soul.

"They believe in me," he wrote to Miss Barrett with reference to their marriage; "if I brought them a beggar or a

famous actress, even, they would believe in her because of me. . . . My father studies my works, illustrating them, and writes his notion of what a criticism should be, none that have appeared satisfying him."

"To his mother's music," Mr. Sharpe writes in his biography, "he was acutely susceptible:."

"It was Mrs Browning's chief happiness this her hour of darkness and solitude and music while, in the next room, the little son would be sitting on his father's knee, listening with enthusiastic attention to the Tale of Troy, with marvellous illustrations among the glowing coals in the fireplace, with below all the vaguely heard accompaniment of the mother's music."

" And Michal's face  
Still wears that quiet and peculiar light  
Like the dim circlet floating round a pearl.

Her calm sweet countenance,  
Though saintly was not sad ; for she would sing  
Alone. Does she still sing alone, bird-like,  
Not dreaming you are near ? Her carols dropt  
In flakes through that old leafy bower built under  
The sunny wall at Wurzburg, from her lattice  
Among the trees above, while, I unseen,  
Sat conning some rare scroll from Tritheim's shelves  
Much wondering notes so simple could divert  
My mind from study. Those were happy days,  
Respect all such as sing when all alone."

—*Paracelsus. Scene III.*

If Browning's love of parents and home and all those moulding influences of boyhood which he was ever grateful for, the practical scholarly and monetary help of his father, the companionship of the religious and musicianly mother, their ever helpful love, are not in the crucible of art in "*Paracelsus*," then the poet, whose first principle was gratitude and amply uttered, who never failed to pay a debt of human kindness by placing it in "rhyme the beautiful for ever," never acknowledged the debt which he owed to his parents, and home benefactions, which is unthinkable.

"I have all Dante in my head and heart," wrote Browning to Miss Barrett ; but how or when Dante superseded Shelley in his regard, he never confided to the world, except by Art.

There is serious discussion about his "*Sordello*" in the letters. Miss Barrett thinks its scenes might be linked up closer and its Art simplified. He replied that "he will think about it."

A letter subsequently related what his further thought revealed, viz: that what had so struck him while writing it was that the high moment of Dante's Sordello was just his own Sordello's great moment, that mystical moment in Dante's Purgatorio.

Dante falls into sudden swoons passing from sphere to sphere up to the one where the earth trembled and the spirits with one voice shouted "Gloria in Excelsis." As they pass on a spirit leaves the motionless prostrate forms and joins the travellers. He explains that the commotion he has heard is not of earthquake or storm but that when a spirit finds itself sufficiently purified to move heavenward all Purgatory trembles with joy and acclamation. "The will to move proves the worthiness," explains the shade, "for all are free from the first, but by the ordinance of heaven, they are—till purified—as eager for the torment as once they were for sin."

"And sinners were we to the extreme hour.

Then light from Heaven fell, making me aware

So that, repenting us and pardoned, out

Of life we passed to God, at peace with Him

Who fills the heart with yearning Him to see."

"That is just my Sordello's story," wrote Browning to Miss Barrett.

After his deliverance, Dante, by the hand of Virgil, is led in vision through the Inferno to Purgatory where he meets Sordello, from which point Beatrice the divine is promised and, answering the petition of the shade of Virgil, Sordello points the way onward which Dante may pursue but Virgil has lost the right of:

"For no impediment

Save want of faith, the heavenly state I lost."

Dante's Purgatory postulates a region inhabited by spirits who have delayed their repentance till their last moments; who wander at will awaiting permission to enter the place of hopeful punishment.

The Sordello of Dante pointed the way upward to the pilgrims who fixing their eyes in expectation to the sky beheld two angels descend.

So protected Dante relates that he fell asleep, and while he slept dreamed that he saw an eagle fluttering over him with feathers of gold, and was taken up into the sky where the eagle and he took fire together. Fear not, said Virgil when he awoke; the interpretation of the dream is that Lucia, representative of enlightenment and grace, had appeared to lead him out of Purgatory to the realm of Penance. There

they see David, dancing as he went, and Michal his wife, sad and disdainful, watching the spectacle.

So, fortified by Dante, he left "Sordello's" future to take care of itself.

Thus he took all the jocularities about "Sordello" on the broad shoulders of his common sense, and the mystic's "be it as God please." "I blame no one least of all myself," said its Preface when issued among his collected works twenty-five years later.

"You must know," we find Miss Barrett writing to the neglected author of "Sordello," "You who have courage and knowledge must know that every work, with the principle of life in it, *will* live, let it be trampled ever so under the heel of a faithless and unbelieving generation—yes, that it will live like one of your toads, for a thousand years in the heart of a rock. All men can teach at second or third hand, as you say—by prompting the foremost rows—by tradition and translation—all except *poets*, who must preach their own doctrine and sing their own song to be the means of any wisdom or any music and have stricter duties laid upon them."

Confidences are exchanged about adherence to Churches, Miss Barrett confessing that it was hard to answer for what she was :

"I meant that I felt unwilling, for my own part, to put on any liveries of the sects. . . . I believe in what is Divine and floats at highest, in all these different theologies—and because the really Divine draws together souls, and tends so to a unity, I could pray anywhere and with all sorts of worshippers from the Sistine Chapel to Mr. Fox's, those kneeling and those standing. Wherever you go, in all religious societies, there is little to revolt, and a good deal to bear with—but it is not otherwise in the world without, and *within* you are especially reminded that God has to be more patient than yourself after all. Still, you go quickest there, where your sympathies are least ruffled and disturbed—and I like, beyond comparison best, the simplicity of the Dissenters . . . the unwritten prayer . . . the sacraments administered quietly and without charlatanism! And the principle of a church, as they hold it, I hold it too . . . quite apart from State necessities . . . pure from the law. . . . Public and social prayer is right and desirable . . . and I would prefer, as a matter of custom, to pray in one of those chapels, where the minister is simple-minded and not controversial—certainly would prefer it. Not exactly the Socinian Chapels nor yet in

Mr. Fox's, not by preference. The Unitarians seem to me to throw over what is most beautiful in the Christian Doctrine, but the Formalists on the other side stir up a dust in which it appears excusable not to see."

Browning replies :

" Dearest, I know your very meaning, in what you said of religion, and responded to it with my whole soul. What you express now is for us both—those are my own feelings, my convictions beside—instinct confirmed by reason. Look at the injunction to 'love God with all the heart and soul and strength,' and then imagine any faculty that arises towards the love of Him be still! If in a meeting-house, with the blank white walls, and a simple doctrinal expression—all the senses should turn (from where they lie neglected) to all that sunshine in the Sistine with its music and painting, which would lift them at once to Heaven—why should you not go forth? to return just as quickly, when they are nourished into a luxuriance that extinguishes, what is called reason's pale wavering light, lamp or whatever it is—for I have got into a confusion with thinking of convolvuluses that climb and tangle round the rose-trees which might be lamps or tapers! See the levity! No—this sort of levity only exists because of the strong conviction, I do believe. There seems no longer need of earnestness, assertion or proof, so it runs lightly over like the top of a wave. . . . All passive obedience and implicit submission of will and intellect is by far too easy, if well considered, to be the course prescribed by God to man in this life of probation—for they *evade* probation altogether, though foolish people think otherwise. Chop off your legs, you will never go astray; stifle your reason altogether, and you will find it difficult to reason ill. It is hard to make these sacrifices; not so hard as to lose the reward, or incur the penalty of an Eternity to come; hard to effect them then and go through with them; not hard when the leg is to be *cut off*—that is rather harder to keep it quiet on a stool, I know very well. The partial indulgence, the proper exercise of one's faculties—there is the difficulty and problem for solution, set by that Providence which might have made the laws of Religion as indubitable as those of vitality, and revealed the articles of belief as certainly as that condition, for instance, by which we breathe so many times in a minute to support life. But there is no reward proposed for the feat of breathing, and a great one for that of believing—conse-



quently there must go a great deal more voluntary effort to this latter than is implied in the getting absolutely rid of it at once, by adopting the direction of an infallible church, or private judgment of another—for all our life is some form of religion, and all our action some belief, and there is but one law, however modified, for the greater and the less."

"All God's urgency, so to speak, is in the justice of His judgments, the rightness of His rule. Yet why? one might ask—if one does believe that the rule is His, why ask further. Because His is a reasoning service once for all. You amuse me sometimes by seeming surprised at some chance expression of a truth, which is grown a veriest commonplace to me."

"There is more in the soul than rises to the surface and meets the eye; whatever does *that* is for the world's immediate uses; and were this world *all, all* in us would be producible and available for use, as it *is* with the body now—but with the soul, what is to be developed afterwards is the main thing, and instinctively asserts its rights—so that when you hate (or love) you shall not be able to explain why? . . . and the rest is with God—whose finger I see every minute of my life."

"The choice of work which must endure for ever," wrote Browning to Miss Barrett, "cannot be scientifically determined and produced at the operator's will, so much youth, so much beauty, so much talent, etc., etc., with the same certainty and precision that another kind of operation will construct you an artificial volcano with so much steel filings and flower of sulphur and what not. The cant is that an "age of transition is the melancholy thing to contemplate and delineate . . . whereas the worst things to look back on are times of comparative standing still, rounded in their impotent completeness—the young England imbeciles hold that 'belief' is the admirable point, in what they judge comparatively immaterial."

"The Artist," he wrote to Miss Barrett, "is not born learned in putting what was born in him into words, whatever *can* be clearly spoken out ought to be—but 'bricks and mortar' is very easily said, and some of the thoughts of Sordello not so readily." "I wrote the poem of Sordello to display what first of all became present in a great light, a whole one—*tell me how these lights are born if you can.*"

But "what do mean by your title 'Bells and Pomegranates'?" she asked, she and Mr. Kenyon, who might be considered fairly intelligent, cannot find the symbol's significance—and remember she warns him the "Davuses" are in majority—(*Davi sumus, non oedipi*).

Does it mean the priestly Hebraic robe? He answers that it does.

Why not disclose your design better? persists the poetess, she would tease him till he did explain himself she declared.

But the note did not satisfy her when it did come, crowded into a corner of the title page of "Colombe's Birthday."

"Faith and Works?" It seems to explain, but does not touch the matter she wrote, it seems inexplicable still. "Singing and sermonizing, the grave and the gay, is not enough, why not explain that it meant the broad hem of the blue robe of the priest of the inner mystery of the Temple," she asks.

"The symbolism of the golden bell and the red pomegranate of the Rabbi's robe covered the subject," he declared, and "to say it in so many cold words would have looked too ambitious. Dante's symbol was the Pomegranate and the pomegranate crowned Raffaello," he added

"But Vasari is not the text book of the world" reminded the poetess.

Why not come down to your public? she remonstrates. Why not explain more? He replies with Goethe's advice about meeting questioners:

"Be it your unerring rule  
Ne'er to contradict a fool,  
For if folly choose to brave you  
All your wisdom cannot save you."

and he himself treats questioners in Jesuit Ogniben fashion. At times, he writes, "it all seems so wearisomely unprofitable, what comes of Smith's second thought if you change the first—out of that will branch as great an error, you may be sure."

The reviews of the time exasperate Miss Barrett:

"So genius is to renounce itself," she writes—"what atheists these critics are, after all, and how the old heathens understood the divinity of gifts. The world should know the truth; it is easier to find a more faultless writer than a poet of equal genius." "For my part," wrote Miss Barrett in another letter, "I would rather fall into the hands of God than man."

"You have helped me to cover a defeat," he writes. "I sincerely hope and trust to show my gratitude for what is promised my future life by doing some real work in it, work of yours as through you. . . . On a kind of principle I have tried before this to subdue the expression of gratitude for the material worldly good you do me. It is the simple truth that

you have been helping me to cover a defeat, not gain a triumph. . . . Whatever love of mine clings to you was created by you—they were not in me, I believe, those feelings, till you came. God bless you, as I say it no vain word.—If you will not believe in the immortality of love, do think the poor thought that when love shall end, gratitude will begin.”

He writes that his whole scheme of life (with its material wants, at least, closely cut down) was long ago calculated. For his future wants he had always refused to care, he wrote. He had lived for a couple of years or more on bread and potatoes once, and preferred a blouse and blue shirt to all manner of dress and gentlemanly appointments, and he could groom his own horse, and would rather live like this than succeed in law (then under consideration as more remunerative than poetry).

But meeting her, all changes, he wrote: he will cease considering the lilies how they grow, he will do all that can be done to earn money for the life in contemplation with her.

“The fact is,” he writes, “not having really cared about anything except not losing too much money, I have taken very little care of my concerns in that way . . . not calling on Moxon for months together. But all will be different now, and I shall look into matters and turn my experience to account, such as it is.

“Whenever I make up my mind to that, I feel I can be rich enough and to spare, because along with what you have called genius in me, is certainly talent, what the world recognises as such, and I have tried it in various ways, just to be sure that I was a little magnanimous in never intending to use it. Thus in more than one of the reviews and newspapers that laughed my ‘Paracelsus’ to scorn ten years ago—in the same column often of these reviews would follow a most laudatory notice of an Elementary French book on a new plan, which I ‘did’ for my old French Master and published—‘that was really a useful work’! So that when the only obstacle is only that there is so much per annum to be produced, you will tell me . . . I desire in this life (with very little fluctuation for a man and too weak a one) to live and just write out certain things which are in me, and so save my soul.”

But “all men ought to be independent,” he writes, “and so, too, I like being alone myself. . . . I suppose I understand Goethe’s meaning when he says every man has liberty enough, political liberty and social. So that when they let him write ‘Faust’ after his own fashion, he does not mind how they dispose of his money.”

He despairs of ever being able to communicate the depths of his soul to anyone, even to her. He regrets this deep secretiveness of his, but emotions that transcend the common experience cannot be presented to it except in hints and flashes ; if a soul shows but one point of superiority over the common taste, ridicule falls. He could only make men and women speak, and present through them a light which he believed he possessed : to keep this light of his at work, and to present, from every angle of incidence, the Light which, he confided, broke upon him as a whole one, was his life's task.

It is only when he is pained, so he writes, that he can disclose himself freely. Under raptures he is cold, uncommunicative as a stone : under joy he is silent, but when pained he must write it out *must*.

The finger of God is veritably the source of his power, he believes : the Hand at his shoulder a felt guidance. The quarter of an hour or so of inspiration, he confesses, is rapture ; the writing of it out, pure drudgery. He had acquired the reputation of being dramatic, partly due to his own fault. He sinned in respect to light words about his work, he records with regret : the poet can but run his own metal into his moulds, he confesses—must relate his own soul to his puppets.

He regrets his deep secretiveness, the mask grows irksome ; he will throw it off at her bidding and speak directly for once as she does. Mankind would know him better in time, but for the present he is helpless against misjudgment and misrepresentation : " Against pure lying," he writes, " a man has no defence." It is a bleak business, this talking to the wind, he confesses, but the not being listened to does not affect his work in the least ; certainly he will not walk with a hand winker-wise to please the minds that are in power, that Keats should go despairing to die in Rome, and Tennyson go softly all his days with one eye on the reviews he could not understand. " Critics ! Hucksters ! " he writes indignantly. " I have my own soul, my own delights. I shall not go die in Rome or take to gin or the newspapers, nor yet lay my sources of strength open to anybody."

### CHAPTER III.

It was through her elderly cousin, John Kenyon, that Miss Barrett met literary London. This kind cousin Kenyon was also a man of independent means derived from West Indian property. He was a man of fifty at this time, a widower, of a calm temperament, described by Miss Barrett in a letter to Miss Mitford as having "rather the solemnity and calmness of *truth* itself than the animation and energy of those who seek for it."

In 1838 the family moved to 50, Wimpole Street, and from thence onward Miss Barrett's health declined rapidly to that of the complete invalid she described herself to be in her early letters to Browning.

Her delicate health had always made hers a position of tender regard to her father. He was proud of the "poet at his knee," and encouraged her poetical gifts and ambitions. At the age of fourteen she had composed the "Epic on Marathon," and was meditating the "Essay on Mind."

The family life of Miss Barrett was that of old-fashioned parental tyranny. Mr. Barrett had a hard, jealous, violent temper, almost amounting to insanity in its violent outbursts. He had a patriarchal view with respect to the obedience of children—the family lived in veriest slavery to the father's commands: "We are reduced to the vices of slaves," Miss Barrett wrote, when circumstances compelled candour to her correspondent. She had but "the freedom of the four walls of home," she wrote. She was in measurable reach of the grave, she believed, but she had the solace of deep study and the imaginative gift, the valiant spirit and responsive soul, and early found her comfort in literature, and dreamed her dream of joining the ranks of poets, the "solemnised and crowned."

It was not until she was about thirty years of age that her girlish delicacy took the alarming nature of nervous prostration and weakness of the lung: her nervous system, she wrote, was completely shattered. She was ordered forty drops of laudanum a day. The cold weather acted on the lung, she wrote, and the necessary shutting up in winter reacted on the nerves, "and thus, without any mortal

disease, I am thrown out of life, out of the ordinary sphere of enjoyment and activity, and made a burden to myself and others."

It was while at Torquay endeavouring to weather the English winter of 1840 that the tragedy occurred which reduced her to the grave's edge. Her favourite brother, Edward, whose studies she had shared, had stayed down with her in defiance of their father's command. She wrote of this illness that she was so ill as to make it seem impossible she could ever be better. Her brother stayed to help her through it, and one day was drowned while yachting with two companions.

Under this blow Miss Barrett succumbed almost to insanity, it seemed to her, she wrote afterwards. She remained for months at Torquay, and after returning to Wimpole Street became the suffering recluse of letters, the religious hermit of some descriptions, the dying woman everyone believed her to be. At the Gloucester Place home she had been sought as a literary luminary, but, owing to health, responded sparingly to invitations. Miss Mitford was one of these new friends—their literary tastes cemented the friendship to intimacy. Miss Mitford described Elizabeth Barrett at this time as the most interesting person she had ever met: her shower of dark curls, her expressive face, her large, tender eyes richly fringed by dark eyelashes, a smile like a sunbeam—such a look of youthfulness that it was difficult to believe she could be the translator of *Æschylus* and author of an "Essay on Mind."

During the five years succeeding the move to Wimpole Street, Elizabeth Barrett never left home. She lay in pain and sorrowing memory alone. She saw but kind Cousin Kenyon and Miss Mitford. She accepted the lot of one in the shadow of death, with youth and health gone, but with literary reputation and poetical fame rising to place her a star in public opinion.

Such was the situation when the correspondence began between them.

"I assure you I never saw Browning in my life—do not know him even by correspondence—and yet, whether through fellow feeling for Eleusinian Mysteries, or whether through the more generous motive of appreciation of his powers I am very sensitive to the thousand and one stripes with which the assembly of critics doth expound its vocation over him, and the Athenaeum for instance made me quite cross and misanthropical last week. The truth is—and the world

should know the truth—it is easier to find a more faultless writer than a poet of equal genius.”

*Letter to an Editor, 1841, from Miss Barrett.*

Miss Barrett has left record in a letter to Miss Mitford of her delight in the reception of her first letter from him: “I had a letter from Browning the poet last night, Browning, the author of ‘Paracelsus’ and ‘King of the Mystics.’” With Elizabeth Barrett in this year 1845 fortune and success in literature had arrived. She had an assured position with the reading public in England and America; her publisher’s report was that her books “went steadily off,” Edgar Allan Poe had just dedicated his volume of poems to her.

In his appreciation of Miss Barrett in his book “The New Spirit of the Age,” Mr. Horne describes her prominent characteristic as

“the struggles of a soul towards heaven—all wings, rich in imagination and ethereal aspirations whose individuality is cast upwards in the divine afflatus. Probably no living individual has a more extensive and diffuse acquaintance with literature—that of the present day inclusive. Although she has read Plato in the original, from beginning to end, and the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Malachi (nor suffered her course to be stopped by the Chaldean), yet there is probably not a single good romance of the most romantic kind in whose marvellous and impossible scenes she has not delighted, over the fortunes of whose immaculate or incredible heroes she has not wept.”

In 1844 Miss Barrett published a collection of poems. One, called “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,” pictured two lovers reading poetry together—Spenser, Petrarch:

“Or at times a modern volume—Wordsworth’s solemn-thoughted idyll,

Howitt’s ballad-verse, or Tennyson’s enchanted reverie—  
Or from Browning some ‘Pomegranate,’ which, if cut deep  
down the middle,

Shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined humanity.”

When Browning read these lines he consulted Mr. Kenyon, who was a friend of his, as to the propriety of writing to Miss Barrett to acknowledge her gracious recognition of him. Mr. Kenyon thought he might write, and, on January 10th, 1845, their correspondence began.

We are not treading profanely in gleaning their story from these letters. Browning himself placed them in his son’s hands with the words, “There, take them and do what you like with them after I am dead and gone,” knowing, and

intending their publication to throw light and truth upon their lives.

The poet's first letter was a tumultuous expression of appreciation of Miss Barrett's work: "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett. . . . I would this once get out of my habit of purely passive enjoyment, when I really do enjoy. . . ."

He tells her of how nearly he met her once; he expected to meet her, but it turned out she was too unwell to be presented to strangers. He describes how he felt, as if he "had been so close to some world's wonder in chapel or crypt, only a screen to push and I might have entered, and the sight was never to see."

After an interchange of letters he writes asking her personal acquaintance.

Miss Barrett resists the proposal. She was so delicate, she wrote. She appreciated her new friend's wish to see her—he was Paracelsus and she a recluse with broken nerves. He was for feasting and sunshine, she for sorrow, unfit for strong emotion—and scarcely to be called young. She never saw visitors, except kind Cousin Kenyon and Miss Mitford.

For four months correspondence passed between the poets before Miss Barrett could consent to a personal acquaintance.

On May 16th she writes in disgust of herself over the "piece of work" she has made of the question.

"I am shy by nature," she wrote—"my nerves are shaken. Come if you care to." But he must not talk of having seen her, because visitors in a general way are impossible. She is ashamed of having made so much fuss—he is extravagant about caring for what will be nothing to him afterwards. She will see him any day between two and six. She knows she has appeared ungrateful—there was nothing to see in her. Her sister will bring him upstairs when he calls, and he must be indulgent and like her as well as he can.

He thanks her for the permission to call—her infinite kindness in consenting. At two on Tuesday. He has acquaintances thick in the vicinity, and should she not feel well enough to see him, he could call again; as a fact, his time is of no importance.

On Miss Barrett's letter of reply to this is the note: "May 20th, 1845, 3-4½ P.M."

His letter to her of May 21st is full of anxious queries: Was she tired? Did he do wrong in anything? Or, if you



please, right in anything? Did he speak too loudly? He has a deaf old relative, and is told he speaks in that loud way now by habit. And did he stay too long? And how happy he feels in this new friendship—"and may God bless you!"

On the following Tuesday another meeting took place. In sudden swirl of emotion he offered her his lifelong devotion. A letter followed immediately, confirming his passionate declaration of love, reaffirming his desire to take her life into his keeping.

Miss Barrett was startled and shocked; she was entirely unprepared for such a storm of feeling. The result was apparently disastrous. His letter was returned, he was bidden to destroy it, commanded to forget his torrent of wild words.

In later months she asked to have this letter returned to her. "Could you think," he answered, "it existed one *moment* after its return so? It was burned, and I cried, Serve it right."

This letter must be dropped as a misprint would be, she wrote. There must be no more wild speaking, no more intemperate words; such fancies are never to be alluded to: this is a condition imperative to their future acquaintance. She begs him remember her exceptional position, which alone makes it possible for her to receive him. Should he revive the subject, she could not—would not—see him again, and for her sake he must observe this. She has so much pleasure in their meetings, she appreciates so all his gifts of thinking and teaching—it is her own praise that she can appreciate him.

He replies in desperate sorrow for his inconsiderate outburst—he who would rather soften and sleeken like a bird before her.

Miss Barrett had to enlighten this visitor as to the need for caution with respect to her father, but her brothers and sisters were glad of his visits if it made their dear "Ba" happy—secrecy must be observed with respect to her father only.

There would be *no* getting over her father, she wrote—as well think to sweep the stars from Heaven with your eye-lashes.

She attempts to explain and justify this attitude of her father's as a truly affectionate desire for his family's welfare. His was a loyal and pure nature, she wrote, which drew her reverence—the evil lay in the system.

Brothers and sisters were made aware of the visits, and were glad to help the lovers.

"If you came here every day," writes Miss Barrett, "my brothers and sisters would simply care to know if I liked it, and then be glad if I was glad—the caution referred to one alone. . . . But though I have been a submissive daughter, and this from no effort, but for love's sake . . . because I loved him tenderly (and love him) . . . yet I have reserved for myself always that right over my own affections, which is the most strictly personal of all things."

"After all papa is the victim. He isolated himself—and now and then he feels it—the cold dead silence all round, which is the effect of the incredible system. If he were not stronger than most men he could not bear it as he does. With such high qualities, too! So upright and honourable—you would esteem him, you would like him, I think—let *that* be the last word."—*Correspondence, late 1845.*

"He was," writes his daughter, "full of deep and tender affection behind and below all those patriarchal ideas of governing grown-up children 'in the way they must go,' and there never was (under a strata) a truer affection in a father's heart . . . no, nor a worthier heart in itself . . . a heart loyaller and purer and more compelling to gratitude and reverence, thus his, as I see it! The evil is in the system—and he simply takes it to be his duty to rule, and to make happy according to his own views of the propriety of happiness—he takes it to be his duty to rule like the King of Christendom, by divine right. But he loves us through and through, and I for one love him."

Miss Barrett was of mature age, and possessed an income which made her independent of her father, but she yielded the point of going to Italy, although to do so seemed a sacrifice of health, perhaps life, under the severe strain of the winter. Her "unforbidden country" lay within the four walls of home, and there was no alternative but to be cheerful and hope for a mild winter.

"You may be quite sure that I shall be well this winter, if in any way it should be possible, and that I *will not* be beaten down, if the will can do anything. I admire how, if all had happened so but a year ago (yet it could not have happened quite so), I should certainly have been beaten down—and how it is different now . . . and how it is only gratitude to you, to say that it is different now. My cage is not worse but better since you brought the green groundsel to it—and to dash oneself against the wires of it will not open the door. We shall see—and God will oversee."

Elizabeth Barrett was the only member of the family with an income of her own—a legacy left by an uncle of £8,000. But she was not allowed to control her money. She would have helped the brother so dear to her, but her hands were “seized and tied,” and in the midst of her grief her brother was drowned, and her heart was broken with sorrow and remorse because she had braved her father’s displeasure for once and kept this brother near her at Torquay in defiance of his wish.

In a letter discussing ways and means, later she explains :  
“ Papa has a power of attorney to manage my money ; he gives me £40 to £45 every three months, income tax deducted Ship money £200 on an average, which I have not used but must in the future use . . . I could not mention money to him Everything is in my name—and if it were not, he could not for a moment think of interfering with an incontestible right of property—Poor Papa’s first act will be to abandon his management : Ah, may God grant him to do it rather angrily than painfully . . . Stormie told me this morning in answer to an enquiry of mine, that certainly I did not receive the whole interest of the fund money—could not—making ever so much allowance for the income tax. And now, upon consideration, I seem to see that I cannot have done so . . . Stormie said there must be three hundred a year of interest from the fund money—even at the low rates of interest paid then.—*Burn this.*”—*Correspondence R.B., E.B.B., Aug. 6th, 1846.*

Mr. Barrett’s activities in the City were speculative, some of Elizabeth’s £8,000 went into a ship which he bought and ran at his own cost, hence the allusion to the casual income from the ship money.

Mr. Barrett also speculated in a quarry in Cornwall—*From Letters to Mr. Kenyon.*

In her second letter of the now famous correspondence she relates an opinion of her as *testa longa*, and though she had had enough to tame her, and might be expected to stand still in her stall, she was still headlong, precipitate, rushing through nettles and briars, instead of keeping the path, guessing at words she did not know, tearing open letters and parcels, and “expecting everything to be done in a minute, and the thunder to be as quick as lightning.”

She had learning rare in her day, and was a sound Greek scholar. The correspondence produces pitfalls for the unlearned by quotation and ellipsis and allusions to a common stock of Greek, and discussion construing the poets : and the

habit of rushing into "one word more," upon a subject discussed on the visit, was added to the cryptic renderings of the Classics.

A still renunciation of life was her attitude of body, but mind and soul demanded liberty to "step out into the Infinite," she dreamed of her poetry "solemnized and crowned among the Immortals her vision assembled: to come true in the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'."

She had just published the little volume of short poems written from her couch in Wimpole Street; this was inscribed to her father in terms of "tenderest holiest affection."

"My desire is that you who are a witness how if this art of poetry had been a less earnest object to me, it must have fallen from exhausted hands before this day."

In his letters of 1845-46 Browning discusses his art and hers, satisfies her curiosity about his feelings under criticism. He declares that he writes from a thorough conviction that it is the duty of him, and with the belief, that after every drawback and shortcoming he was doing his best—"that is, for *me*"—and so being not listened to by one human creature would in no wise affect him. He did not now go about wanting the fixed stars before his time, and was very grateful to this new friend who had taken away his reproach from among men, "who have each and all their friend, they say."

"I have my own soul and my own secret delights. I shall not go die in Rome or take to gin and the newspapers—meaning on the whole to be a poet if not *the* Poet—for I am vain and ambitious some nights. Such a bird as my black self that goes screeching about the world for dead horse, I, too, who have been at such pains to acquire the reputation I enjoy in the world, and who dine and wine and dance and enhance the company's pleasure till they make me ill and keep house as of late. Mr. Kenyon says my common sense strikes him, and its contrast with my muddy metaphysical poetry. My own way of worldly life is marked out long ago, as precisely as yours can be, and I am not going with a hand winker-wise on each side of my head and a directing finger before my eyes, to say nothing of an instinctive dread I have that a certain whip-lash is vibrating somewhere in the neighbourhood in playful readiness." "What I have printed," he confides, "gives no knowledge to me . . . these scenes and song scraps *are* such mere and very escapes of my inner power, which lives in me like the light in those crazy Mediterranean phares, I have watched at sea, wherein the light is ever revolving in a dark gallery, bright and alive, and

only after a weary interval leaps out, for a moment, from the one narrow chink, and then goes on with the blind wall between it and you; and no doubt, *then* precisely, does the poor drudge that carries the cresset set himself most busily to trim the wick—for don't think I want to say I have not worked hard (this head of mine knows better)—but the work has been *inside*, and not when at stated times I held up any light to you. The more one sits and thinks over the creative process, the more it confirms itself as inspiration, nothing more nor less. Or at worst you write down old inspirations, what you remember of them . . . but with *that* it begins. Reflexion is exactly what it names itself—a representation in scattered rays from every angle of incidence, *of what first of all became present in a great light, a whole one.*"

"Subtleties of thought," writes Miss Barrett, discussing his poem "The Lost Mistress," "which are not directly apprehensible to minds of common range, are here as elsewhere in your writings; but if to utter things hard to understand from that cause of offence, why we may begin with 'Our beloved brother Paul.'"

"Genius precedes, initiates," she is of opinion; "it is genius which gives an age its character and imposes its own colour. You are above all these clouds—your element is otherwise. Men are not your taskmasters that you should turn to them for recompense. As for your poetry, I believe in it as golden water. It would be a curious and instructive process," Miss Barrett thinks, "to collect the critical opinion of every age touching its own literature. Shakespeare's age was considered quite unilluminated to Sir Philip Sidney—the denial of contemporary genius is the rule rather than the exception of the great body of critics. You observe rightly, that they are better than might be expected of their badness. The brazen kettles will be taken for oracles all the world over."

Casual gossip about Browning reaches Miss Barrett. She informs him that report says that he is engaged, also that he is an atheist.

He replies with a story of a foolish mix-up of his name with a Mr. Brown then producing a play.

Much as he goes into society he hates it—has only put up with it these six or seven years past, lest by foregoing it some unknown good should escape him, but writes and "now that I have done most of what is to be done, any lodge in a garden of cucumbers for me! I don't even care about reading now—the world and pictures of it, rather than

writings about the world ! But you must read books in order to get words and forms for ' the public ' if you *write*, and *that* you needs must do, if you fear God. I have no pleasure in writing myself—none in the mere act—though all pleasure in the sense of fulfilling a duty, whence if I have done my real best, judge how heart-breaking a matter must it be to be pronounced a poor creature by critic this and acquaintance the other. But I think you like the operation of writing, as I should that of painting or making music, do you not ? After all, there is a great delight in the *heart of the thing* ; and use and forethought have made me ready at all times to set to work—but—I don't know why—my heart sinks whenever I open this desk ; and rises when I shut it. Yet but for what I have written you would never have heard of me—and through what you have written, not properly for it, I love and wish you well ! ”

He recalled his first knowledge of her through her poems and how he wrote to her at first, on the whole, unwillingly, preferring, until he saw his name mentioned in her poem, to allow his admiration of her work to go the usual way in silence.

As for expecting what followed ! Why, he kept on with his scheme of getting done with England to go to his heart in Italy.

## CHAPTER IV.

A number of letters refer to visits arranged for, visits postponed. Miss Barrett can bear so little excitement, and the visits must remain an absolute secret even from Mr. Kenyon. But in a few months he has to be taken into their confidence, for, she writes: "He looks at me with such scanning spectacles, talks of it being a mystery to him how the poet found his way to Wimpole Street"; and although she can bespeak self-command, she has no presence of mind, and "he says you deserve to be a poet—being one in heart and life."

So the visits are confessed as generally once a week, for fear he should hear of them from other quarters.

From May to August there is a trustful drifting with the stream. Visits and letters concern themselves with the surface things of personality, with public questions, with poetical emotions, with confessions of their Art, with their previous meeting—a headlong rushing into reply of something discussed which breaks the correspondence from outside comprehension. "My letters seem naturally to *answer* any strong point brought out in the previous afternoon's discourse and not then disposed of . . . the vile fashion of a disputatious 'last word'—one word yet," he writes towards the end of the correspondence.

In one long sad afternoon's talk the tyranny of the home circumstances is revealed, and how the situation galled and chafed the delicate woman past endurance. The cloud charged with thunder and lightning always hanging over the household—how could she make her visitor understand the family slavery, the violence of her father towards wooers of his daughters?

One day in August the pent-up trouble was revealed, the anti-social temper of her father made known; but directly the sustaining presence of this sympathetic friend is withdrawn she repents her disclosures, and a letter is hastily written and dispatched, begging him to forget her outpouring, to place her trouble at its right source, to lay it all to broken nerves left by years of ill-health and consuming grief left by the death of her brother by drowning. She relates this tragedy as it occurred; she could speak of it to no one else,

and he is bidden to forget her lapse of control and never mention that subject of conversation again.

The man is baffled ; he longs to take this broken life into his keeping ; he has been bidden never to make mention of his love again, and is in honour bound to observe the command. His loyalty to this confuses the correspondence ; he hesitates ; two days pass without a letter.

Miss Barrett cannot rest. What is the matter ? she writes. Was he vexed ? Was he not well ? Would he send her just a line to relieve her anxiety which was torturing her ?

At her appeal he replies renewing his previous offer of lifelong devotion to her—her command must be broken now that he knows her circumstances ; he must be allowed to say again—“ this only once ”—that he had offered her heart and soul and life wholly independent of any return on her part, and now did so again.

“ How shall I deserve or be grateful enough to this new strange friend of my own, that has taken away my reproach among men that have each and all their friend, so they say ? I don’t go about now wanting the fixed stars before my time, this world has not escaped me, thank God ; and—what other people say is the best of it may not escape me after all, though until so very lately I made up my mind to do without it.”

“ Let me say now—*this only once*—that I loved you from my soul, and gave you my life, so much of it as you would take, and all that is *done*, not to be altered now : it was, in the nature of the proceeding, wholly independent of any return on your part . . . ”

“ How ‘ all changes ! ’ When I first knew you—you know what followed. I supposed you to labour under incurable complaint—and, of course, to be completely dependent on your father for its commonest alleviations—While I *dream* let me once dream ! I would marry you now and thus—I would come when you let me, and go when you bade me—I would be no more than one of your brothers—‘ *no more* ’—“ God bless you.” R.B.

“ How would any woman have felt hearing such words. My heart was full when you came to-day. Henceforward I am yours for everything but to do you harm—whether friend or more than friend . . . a friend to the last in any case.”

Miss Barrett remonstrates.

“ I cannot help adding that if it’s love, yours has not been quite the hardest part . . . and this brings me to complaining that you who profess to believe in me, do yet obviously



believe that it was only merely silence which I required of you on one occasion—and that if I had known your power over yourself, I should not have minded—I asked for silence—but *also* and chiefly for the putting away of . . . could I be justified in abetting such a step—the step of wasting, in a sense, your best feelings . . . I thought too, at first, that the feeling on your part was a mere generous impulse, likely to expend itself in a week perhaps . . . Your life ! If you gave it to me and I put my whole heart into it ; what should I put but anxiety, and more sadness than you were born to . . . Therefore we must leave this subject—and I must trust you to leave it without one word more.

“ May God bless you, my dearest friend.

“ Ever yours,

“ E.B.B. Aug. 31st, 1845.”

“ You do not understand me to be living and labouring and writing (and *not* writing) in order to be successful in the world’s sense ? I even convinced the people *here* what was my true, honourable position in society, etc., etc., therefore I shall not have to inform *you* that I desire to be very rich, very great ; but not in reading Law gratis with dear foolish old Basil Montagu, as he ever and anon bothers me to do.”

Miss Barrett asserts that she would not be justified in abetting him in a step which would be a wasting of his best feelings. She assures him that she believed his generous impulse would have expended itself in a week. “ We must leave this subject . . . I must trust you to leave it without one word more.”

To her serious letter he replies with the review of the circumstances of his early declaration. He takes the regard and esteem which she gives him with bowed head, but presses the question whether it is on his account that she bids him leave the subject ; he assures her that it is not ten, nor twenty years, since he began to look into his own life, and study its end and requirements.

“ I know,” he asserts, “ if one may know anything, that to make that life yours and increase it by union with yours, would render me *supremely happy*, as I said, and say, and feel . . . Tell me what I have a claim to hear. I can bear it, and be as grateful as I was before and am now—your friendship is my pride and happiness. If you told me your love was bestowed elsewhere, and that it was in your power to serve you *there*, to serve you there would still be my pride and happiness. . . . My whole scheme of life (with its wants, material wants at least, closely cut down) was long ago

calculated—and it supposed you, the finding such an one as you, utterly impossible—because in calculating one goes upon *chances*, not on providence—how could I expect you? So for my own future way in the world I have always refused to care. Anyone who can live a couple of years and more on bread and potatoes as I did once on a time, and who prefers a blouse and blue shirt to all manner of gentlemanly appointments—such an one need not very much concern himself beyond considering the lilies how they grow. But now I see you near this life, all changes—and at a word, I will do all that ought to be done.”

He feels that, penniless as he is, he could earn money, and relates that Charles Kean offered him £500 for a play that suited him, and that Mr. Colburn “wanted more than his dinner a novel on Napoleon.”

His friend replies that “never has any man been to my feelings what you are,” but—

“But something worse than a sense of unworthiness God has put between us! and judge yourself if to beat your thoughts against the immovable marble of it, can be anything but pain and vexation of spirit, waste and wear of spirit to you—judge! The present is here to be seen speaking for itself! and the best future you can imagine for me, what a precarious thing it must be—a thing for making burdens out of—only not for your carrying, as I have vowed to my own soul. As dear Mr. Kenyon said to me to-day in his smiling kindness—‘In ten years you may be strong perhaps—or almost strong’; that being the encouragement of my best friends—and so if you are wise and would be happy (and you have excellent practical sense after all, and should exercise it) you must leave me—these thoughts of me, I mean—for if we might not be true friends for ever, I should have less courage to say the other truth. But we may be friends always—and cannot be so separated, that your happiness, in the knowledge of it, will not increase mine. And if you will be persuaded by me, as you say, you will be persuaded thus—and consent to take a resolution and force your mind at once into another channel.”

The vital objection of her father’s opposition to his children entertaining such feelings is urged as a second thought, and the letter concludes:

“In reply to some words of yours, you cannot despise the gold and gauds of the world more than I do, and should do even if I found a use for them.” She confides the fact to him that she could not be poor if she wished it, as she has three or four hundred a year of which no living will could dispossess

her. She assures her friend that she is grateful—"grateful enough to be truthful in all ways."

To this the poet replies in manly submission :

"Until you so see, and so inform me, I shall never utter a word—for that would involve the vilest of implications. I thank God, I *do* thank Him, that in this whole matter I have been, to the utmost of my power, not unworthy of His introducing you to me, in this respect that, being no longer in the first freshness of life, and having for many years now made up my mind to the impossibility of loving any woman—having wondered at this in the beginning, and fought not a little against it, having acquiesced in it at last, and accounted for it all to myself, and become, if anything, rather proud of it than sorry—I say when real love, making itself at once recognised as such, *did* reveal itself to me at last, I *did* open my heart to it with a cry—not caring for its overturning all my theory—nor mistrust its effect upon a mind set in ultimate order, so I fancied for the few years more—nor apprehend in the least that the new element would harm what was already organised without its help . . . and I repeat to you that I, with all to be thankful for to God, am most of all thankful for this the last of all His providences—your regard for me is *all* success—let the rest come or not come . . . You will be the first to say to me, 'Such an obstacle has ceased to exist—or is now become impalpable to you, one you may try and overcome'—and I shall be there, and ready—ten years hence as now—if alive.

"One final word on the other matters—the 'worldly matters'—I shall own I alluded to them rather ostentatiously, because—because that would be the one poor sacrifice I could make you—one I would cheerfully make, but a sacrifice and the only one: this careless 'sweet habitude of living'—this absolute independence of mine, which if I had it not, my heart would starve and die—and this light rational life I lead, and know so well that I lead; this I would give up for nothing less than what you know—but I *would* give it up. . . . Till Thursday, then."

But Thursday could not be; it must be Saturday. She has a headache and is weary at heart, and lays it upon her friend to avoid one subject which must lie where it fell. In the evening she sends a second letter to answer his renewed offer of devotion, to traverse the difficulties in the way of her acceptance of his proposal. She had done living, she thought, when he found her out. His interest in her had been wonderment to her. She is on such precarious ground in health and

would not wrong his destiny with the care of one who is known as a confirmed invalid ; her use may be just that she might pray for him—a sufficient end. The subject must be left untouched on Saturday, must be ignored henceforth.

But Saturday also proves impossible ; Monday it must be, unless hearing to the contrary. She writes sadly of her father's opposition to her wintering at Pisa, which has been suggested to avoid the English winter months. She has been advised it was dangerous for her to have to bear the rigour of another winter in England.

She writes sadly now of this discussion with her father on the question of her wintering in Italy. She asks his advice about braving parental displeasure. He answers with a long letter. He sympathises with a father's pride and love in his child, his jealousy and vigilance in guarding his jewel, but in this instance guardianship means ruin. God, he writes, does not prescribe passive obedience in this life of probation—that is too easy ; exercise of will is necessary :

John Donne is quoted to the effect that “weakness invites, but silence feasts oppression.”

Miss Barrett replies that still her answer must be the same. She cannot take advantage of such noble extravagance. His words make her happy ; she blesses him for this further proof of his attachment—they removed the small bitternesses of her life. But now she feels profoundly touched. She will be his for everything but harm. If her illness frees her within a moderate time, she will then be to him whatever he may choose—friend or more than friend : it rests with God and him. But till then he is free ; he cannot dispel her belief that it would be better for him to forget her in one relation.

The plan of her wintering in Italy is much discussed by the brothers and sisters. George Barrett approaches his father on the subject ; Mr. Kenyon attempts his persuasions ; but, writes Miss Barrett : “In this dead silence of Papa's it all seems impossible.”

To go to Italy without her father's consent was impossible to her, and words had been said that could not easily be forgotten. She had urged that health for her seemed to depend upon wintering out of England ; his reply was that she could do as she liked—he washed his hands of her altogether. She is understood to be in disgrace ; her father's evening visits have ceased. George Barrett has been told by his father that her going to Italy would be under his heaviest displeasure. Her only country allowed lay between the four walls of her

room, she wrote, and all left to do was to be cheerful and hope for a mild winter.

Her lover is given the origin of her pet name, "Ba"—short for baby—the name which, in the family's use of it, wrote Miss Mitford, "from their lips seemed like a caress."

In one of her poems Miss Barrett pleads for tenderness to it, the pet name given by the brother so tragically drowned at Torquay.

She did not like the name of Elizabeth, she wrote to Miss Mitford, she was never called by it by anyone who loved her ; she would no more answer to it than her sisters would :

" I have a name, a little name  
Uncadenced for the ear,  
Unhonoured by ancestral claim,  
Unsanctified by prayer and psalm,  
The solemn font anear.

" My brother gave that name to me  
When we were children twain,  
When names acquired baptismally  
Were hard to utter as to see  
That life had any pain.

" This name whoever chance to call  
Perhaps your smile may win.  
Nay, do not smile ! mine eyelids fall  
Over mine eyes, and feel withal  
The sudden tears within.

" Nay, do not smile ! I hear in it  
What none of you can hear—  
The talk upon the window seat,  
The bird and wind that did repeat  
Around our human cheer.

" I hear the birthday's noisy bliss,  
My sisters' woodland glee—  
My father's praise, I did not miss,  
When stooping down he cared to kiss  
The poet at his knee—

" And voices, which to name me, age  
Their tenderest tones were keeping—  
To some I never more can say  
An answer, till God wipes away  
In Heaven these drops of weeping."

From first to last in the letters the headaches Browning suffered from are alluded to. May 3, 1845—12—27—June 7—24, July 9—25—28—31 record the persistent headaches, probably due to astigmatism says the specialist to-day!

So much reading hurts me . . . whether the reading be light or heavy, fiction or fact, and so much writing—whether my own—such as you have seen, or the merest compliments—returning to the weary tribe that exacts it of me.” August 8th, 1845.

“My important headaches are tolerably kept under—headaches proper they are not.” September 5th.

“Those sensations in the head are frightful and ought to be stopped by whatsoever means.” November 21st. E.B.B.

“And now that the headaches have begun again and the worse than headache.” November 25th. E.B.B.

“I will not write much to-night, my head gives warning.” January 26th, 1845.

“A long noisy dinner with speechmaking and long walk at the end of it—these have given me such a bewildering headache.” February 7th, 1846.

Headache admitted March 18th, 1846, March 24th, March 29th.

“It was the proof-correcting” replies E.B.B. March 31st.

“My head aches—part from pure perversity and a little from the morning spent over a novel of Balzac’s.” April 21st.

“Stupid head will not be quiet to-day, partly because I have been reading.” June 2nd.

“Since you *will* be teased with the intelligence about it, my head was not very well yesterday, but it is decidedly better this morning.” July 30th, 1846.

“Writes with an aching head.” August 31st.

“My head will not get quite well.” September 2nd.

“My head still teases.” September 5th.

“I am not to see you to-morrow. I went to consult a doctor—I am bidden to go to bed for a day or two.” September 8th.

“Here I lie with a dizzy head.” September 8th.

In a letter to Miss Barrett at this time the poet quotes from a poem in his desk, which remained in his desk except for this fragment in the letter :

“She shall speak to me in places lone  
With a low and holy tone—  
Ay! when I have lit my lamp at night  
She shall be present with my sprite :

And I will say, whate'er it be,  
Every word she telleth me."

"But why not spirit, rather than sprite, which has a different association by custom," replies the poetess.

In his last words to the world Browning asks for pity in his task, and understanding of him.

"Oh to love so, be so loved; yet so mistaken!"

The pity of it, which he felt in his last utterance in 1889 was expressed to Miss Barrett in 1845:

"I don't lay open my resources to everybody. It does so happen, that I have met with much more than I could have expected in this matter of prompt and kindly recognition. I never wanted a real set of good hearty praisers and no bad reviewers—I am quite content with my share. No—what I laughed at in my gentle audience is a sad trick the real admirers have of admiring at the wrong place. *That does make me savage, never the other kind of people . . .*"

With "complete frankness," Browning described the long-drawn desolateness of his early and middle life as a literary man: how after certain spirits had seemed to rejoice in his first sprightly runnings, and especially in "Paracelsus," a blight had fallen upon his very admirers."

"At that time the public absolutely declined to buy Mr. Browning's books . . . he was silent after the production of 'Strafford,' but all the time busy with copious production. 'Pippa Passes' he concluded before 1840, and two Tragedies with the intention of seeing them acted. These plays, however, found no manager or publisher willing to accept them."

Browning confessed this past when giving Mr., now Sir Edmund Gosse, the materials for an article in 1871—a step rendered necessary, much as he disliked giving the public any information about himself. He consented reluctantly, saying, 'I am willing to give you all the facts I can. I am tired of this tangle of facts and fancies.' After giving a great mass of facts, he characteristically thought better of it, and much of it of extreme interest was struck out. In those interviews he touched with "slight irony on the entirely unintelligible 'Sordello'" and the forlorn hopes of "Bells and Pomegranates."

## CHAPTER V.

It proves very difficult to secure the once-a-week meeting. The privileged visitor, Cousin Kenyon, fixes a visit for Tuesday, so Wednesday must be substituted. He does not arrive on Tuesday, so Wednesday or Thursday may see him. A brother is feared to have an infectious fever, so another week must pass, she thinks. But her lover is not afraid of infectious fevers, and arrives to pay his weekly visit.

The good Kenyon is constantly in the way ; offers, indeed, to put off a journey so as to be able to visit and cheer his cousin, who he notices is depressed.

Uneventful weeks pass. Winter must be patiently endured. An extra visit a week is suggested and emphatically resisted. If all were known, she writes, the visits would be stopped altogether. It is not her fault that she has to choose between loves. Twice a week occasionally, then, but no habit of it : he *must* understand—both had been carried too far, and there would be no reasoning with her father on discovery—only thunder.

There were both amusing and distressful things she could tell him of the parental habit. Once she might have thought she would be forgiven anything, but not now. But no fear need be felt of the other members of the family ; suspicions might fall, but no information would be laid. And by a strange characteristic that one person never drew conclusions, suspected no danger till the thrust came ; and even if a suitor were a Prince of impeccable descent, with certificate of character from their chapel authorities, it would be the same. It is laughable, she writes, except when it brings weeping. Henrietta has a lover and bore the yoke. Her cousin, Captain Surtees-Cook, comes casually, and openly and meekly hears the views of the head of the house concerning the obedience of children coupled with the word "marriage" : during which holding forth children silently vanish, leaving the visitor to plumb the question of filial dependence as a matter of mere curiosity.

In January Miss Barrett is so much better in health that she writes of having walked downstairs into the drawing-room : walked, mind ! Although it is January, and she has always been carried before to keep her from the draughts.



It was a warm January ; she felt so well. The family were as astonished as if she had walked out of the window. Kind brother Stormie had broken through his bashfulness and awkwardness to say how pleased he was to see her down.

By May her recovered health is a thing to exult over. She sends in a letter a wonderful thing—a piece of laburnum gathered by her as she walked in Regent's Park—"We shall walk together under the trees."

And such strange phantoms people looked to her after her long seclusion in that dark back-room, so wonderful it all was, so unreal she felt among them—the idea of him and herself was her only grip on reality.

In June she is so well that she goes visiting : "Not first to Mr. Kenyon, as would be supposed," she writes, but to her old nurse Miss Trepsack—"Treppy," who had nursed them all, and their father before them—she had full right to the first visit paid.

Then she goes for a drive in the carriage which is waiting to take her sister Henrietta to a party. She and Arabel and Flush had a turn together ! "How unexpected to see people walking about the streets again !"

Sunday, June 6th, finds her writing a letter in the drawing-room, the first piece of writing out of her room for five years. During the week she drives to see her old tutor, Mr. Boyd, who was blind. The visit was in the nature of an experiment. He was not really old, but nervous and infirm, refusing to move from his upstairs rooms ; a scholar still adding the study of Ossian to Greek. "He has no sensibilities, would perhaps sleep a little sounder after news of her death ; for instance, when he felt sorry, he used to say he just felt inclined to go to sleep."

Then a card is left on Mr. Kenyon on her way to another visit to Mr. Boyd, who lived in St. John's Wood. She feels nervous, but her sisters rally her and the visit is paid.

Another visit is paid to the outside world by Miss Barrett. This time to the Paddington Chapel, to hear her friend Mr. Stratton preach. He was a man of divine character, she wrote, and she would like to have consulted him in her difficulties and perplexities, but felt it would be wronging her sisters, who, if her father discovered, it would deprive her sister Arabel of communicating with him or of attending his church, which would have been a serious loss to her.

Her improved health now brings the problem of visitors, who, one and all, must be kept in ignorance that she knew anything personally of Browning.

There was her old friend Miss Mitford, who had been her only visitor for so long, who would certainly be very unsympathetic to the new situation of things.

A Miss Bayley had been desperately anxious to take Miss Barrett to Italy if the father's consent could have been secured : from her the position must be concealed at all cost.

There was Mrs. Jameson, true and useful friend, who in the end was taken into their confidence to the extent of the admission that her friend had a secret ; she was allowed to guess its nature.

Mr. Kenyon was the most serious difficulty. To tell him was impossible, to deceive him very repugnant, but for his own sake it had to be done. His visits were frequent ; he was suspicious, he put difficult questions to the sisters downstairs. Browning himself was disposed to give him his confidence, but Miss Barrett knew her cousin better—he could not stand a severe test, this good quixotic cousin, so anxious to help everyone. It was *her* secret, she reminds her lover.

There is an invasion of relations from the country. Aunt Hedley is about during the day and makes awkward remarks at dinner. She had not seen “ Ba ” all day, she said, and, to her astonishment, when she went into her room a gentleman was sitting there.

“ Mr. Browning called,” faltered Arabel.

“ And,” went on Aunt Hedley, “ ‘ Ba ’ signed to me as if she meant me not to go in.”

“ Oh,” exclaimed Henrietta, “ *that* must be a mistake—perhaps she really meant you to go in.”

“ You should have gone in and seen the poet,” said Mr. Barrett, for he was proud of his daughter's acquaintance with Browning, and ready permission had been given for occasional visits—“ but only once in a while.”

He was now almost the old playful papa again, wrote Miss Barrett ; called her his puss and his love. If she were only strong enough to put the case before him now. But it was impossible—she dreaded the result : they would be certainly separated ; all powers of choice would be taken from her ; writing would be prohibited ; meetings disallowed.

She was not strong enough for the storm certain to follow, she wrote ; her father's angry voice would stretch her into a faint. Her temperament was too nervous for disclosures. Positive disobedience to orders would be more racking than the unauthorised disobedience of secret marriage : her terror blinds her—God must direct for the best.

The father's affectionate manner lasts but a short time. There was a terrific thunderstorm one day in August, which prevented Browning leaving the house at the usual time, and Mr. Barrett by some chance arrived home earlier than usual. Miss Barrett knew there was storm gathering in her father's breast in the room below.

Before going in to dinner he went into her room. She was lying in a loose wrap, exhausted with the strain she had been through.

"Have you been dressed like this all day?" was the angry question.

"No; only just now—the heat was so trying."

"That *man*," he replied, with grave displeasure, "has spent the whole day with you, it appears."

"He meant to go several times—the rain prevented him."

The interview left Miss Barrett so nervous and unstrung that the visits must be discontinued for at least a week, she wrote.

Serious plans for a secret marriage are now discussed. It must not be suspected by a soul: that much has been made clear by the father's angry outburst. Wilson, Miss Barrett's maid, must be the only confidante—she could be trusted absolutely; they would take her away with them, and, as a matter of fact, Miss Barrett could not put together the necessary clothes for herself, much more get herself out of the house without a soul knowing.

The storm would be terrible, she wrote; whoever helped would have to suffer. Wilson must be taken for her own sake—and dear little Flush, too.

September is fixed upon; it would be too cold later. But there is much to think of, much to arrange. And there is the money question to be grappled with. Browning is remorseful at his failure as a money-getter; he is mortified and humiliated that he is absolutely penniless.

He had proposed a scheme of studying law. This Miss Barrett had incontinently disposed of—there is her income, she asserts.

This galls him: he insists upon a legal document being drawn up for the reversion of Miss Barrett's money to her sisters in the event of her death. This quixotic idea was passionately opposed by Miss Barrett, and in the end she had her way.

From the beginning the family of Browning shared the secret that this great change had come in his life. This he

insisted upon. Why should his mother and father not know? Why should he wound them to the heart, they who since childhood had denied him nothing that their love and means could compass? To end by deception would break their hearts.

Browning's love and gratitude to his parents amounted to a passion. In his letters is described the deep kindliness of his father, who would cloak a self-sacrificing action with "cheerful absurdities about inclination."

He recalls his father's ungrudging generosity in paying for the publication of his poems, his whole-souled furtherance of his achievements although apparently at a hopeless loss.

The fact that his marriage was only possible because Miss Barrett had an income of her own pressed upon him sorely. He had to accept a loan of a hundred pounds from his father for the expenses of the marriage.

"This disregard as to money must cease," he writes. "As to my copyrights, I never meant to sell them . . . even in their present disadvantageous form, without advertisement and unnoticed by the influential journals, do somehow manage to pay their expenses. I have had one direct offer to print a new edition. . . . Smith and Elder, for instance, wrote to offer to print any poem about Italy in any form, with any amount of advertisements, on condition of sharing profits.

"I desire to live and ju . . . write out certain things which are in me, and so save my soul. I would endeavour to do this if I were forced to live among lions, as you once said—but I should best do this if I lived quietly with myself and with you. I shall do all—under your eyes and with your hand in mine—all I was intended to do. I mean to write wondrous works—and sell them too—and out of it all may easily come some fifty or sixty horrible pounds a year, on which one lives famously at Ravenna, they say.

"The fact is, not having cared about anything except not losing too much money, I have taken very little care of my concerns that way."

From his father the hundred pounds was received as a loan, to be paid back out of his first literary earnings. "I told you," he wrote, "they believe me . . . therefore know in some measure what you are to be."

Miss Barrett calculates that she could with scarcely an effort make a hundred a year by magazine contributions:

" . . . May God help us," she writes, "and smooth the way before and behind. May your father indeed be able to love me a little, for *my* father will never love me again."

"I hope and believe," replies Browning, "that by your side I shall accomplish something to justify God's goodness and yours—and looking at the matter in a worldly light, I see not a few reasons for thinking that unproductive as the kind of literature may be, which I aim at producing, yet by judicious management I shall be able to realise an annual sum quite sufficient for every purpose—at least in Italy."

A new leaf of life is felt to be ready awaiting the turning; trustful drifting with the stream is over; any day may bring some crisis to force the situation.

Italy is decided upon; the means for the flight are provided. The step must be taken before October, with its cold mornings and dark evenings; the beginning of the dreaded winter would "cry out at their folly." If unable to take the plunge now, they must "wait till next autumn, and the next, and the next, if necessary"; but if she could prepare herself for it, let it be the end of September. He would use no arguments to coerce; but to take her away in winter, and should anything irretrievably happen to her health—what would his fate of remorse be at allowing the summer to slip away? There would be no fate for him but to "live and die in some corner where the English language was never heard in comment on my wretched imbecility."

The reply brings a remonstrance. What reason had she given him to thus doubt her willingness to take the extreme step with him? She could understand . . . in self-respect he would be justified in abandoning the whole thing. She could not complain at that, but she had a right to protest against the imputation cast upon her *bona fides* over the secret marriage proposal. In July she had promised to go in August instead of September, if suitable—she made no difficulties; he himself had replied that "October or November would do as well."

Is he just, she pleads, to doubt her willingness to complete the engagement? Can she help it—these painful home circumstances? Did she not prophesy they must be painful? No one could know who had not felt the pricks. She could quote Prometheus, but has no heart for quotations now: she would only say she has never wavered from her promise, and will fulfil it within a week if he choose . . . if September be possible, so let it be. She is not angry at his reproaches and doubts, though he has been hard on her, who gives up all her world at the holding up of his finger . . . she kisses the dear finger-tips all the same, and is ready whensoever *it* shall be ready.

The position is "horrible," she allows, and may not be disguised with his gifts of roses, his thoughts of her—worse situation to her than to him, for what is painful arrives to him but once a week, presses upon her continually. To hear the voice of her father shrivels her up, to meet his eye makes her shrink; to talk to her brothers leaves her unnerved and shaken; even the sympathy of her sisters turns to sorrow under the fear of what they may have to suffer through it.

The decision had to be faced with startling swiftness.

On September 9th Miss Barrett writes, in great agitation, that an edict has gone forth from her father that the house is to be left for a month for cleaning purposes. One of her brothers is commanded to take a house at Dover—Reigate—anywhere; they were to settle it among themselves. They were merely to go without delay.

"What can be done?" she writes. She leaves it to him to think and decide.

Quick, short, decisive comes the answer: the marriage must take place immediately—he will get the licence to-day. The marriage could take place on the 12th. Send a ring as measure for the wedding-ring.

He is making arrangements with a friend to be at the church on Saturday—they can arrange further at their meeting next day. "You must write short notes to the necessary persons. You will not fail me. The marriage over, your preparations for leaving may be made quickly. All information will be given to-morrow."

The same evening comes Miss Barrett's reply: she has but one word, one will—that is, his. "But do nothing precipitately," she begs. They are not to go on Monday; her brother has merely gone to enquire about accommodation for them, means simply to go to Reigate. The ring for her measure will be given him the next day on his call—will be safer than sending it. He has not mentioned his own health—she is anxious for him. She will not fail him—his decision shall be hers—she gave herself to him long ago. Though he generously hints at her right to draw back, she sends another affirmation for her own sake. She is to be alone next day—all the others are going to holiday make at Richmond; they will be quite alone.

The meeting took place next day, plans were arranged for the marriage on Saturday.

Miss Barrett and her maid Wilson left the house quietly on Saturday morning, September 12th, and arriving at Marylebone Church were met by Browning and his

cousin. The marriage ceremony was over in half an hour ; then bride and bridegroom parted at the church door—she to go back to her home for a week till the departure from England could be arranged for.

At one o'clock the bridegroom writes to his bride from his home at New Cross.

He writes to sustain the trembling woman, to assure her of his love ; repeats the homage of his feeling, so deep that it cannot express itself. His professions seem to fall short of the requirements of the situation. In every feature of the past acquaintance she has been " entirely perfect." His only desire was to keep her love, and the persistent note of faith all through the correspondence rises : confidence that God had raised up this friend for him and faith in this power to retain it to him. She had given him the highest mark of her confidence—faith in him, the supreme faith one human being could vest in another. He was deeply grateful, and supremely proud that his life should be so crowned by her love. That God would bless her, he prays as her very own now. She must take all care of the life that was his now, and regain composure somehow. And please thank Wilson for him.

At half-past four the bride writes her account of the return to her home.

Just a word to reassure him that the day has not slain her. She went to Mr. Boyd's from the church, so allowing Wilson to get home quickly with the information required as to where she was.

Mr. Boyd was happily engaged with someone. She rested on his sofa downstairs, had some wine and food, and at last the two sisters came, " with such grave faces." They had missed her and Wilson—were anxious and frightened. Their remarks hinted their fears, met by the trembling sister by evasions of what nonsense they were saying, and to reassure them they went for a drive to Hampstead Heath. She was feeling prostrated—had not slept all the night before ; was so weak on starting for the church, had had to call at a chemist's for a restorative. She had assured Wilson of their gratitude ; she was very kind to her, and had never shrunk at what was before her. As she and her sisters drove past Marylebone Church on their way home her sight clouded—pray his mother, she begs, to forgive her : but that the bride was herself his mother might have been at her son's wedding. And if any harm is to come to anyone for what they have done, she prays it may fall on her.

A difficult day has to be got through on Sunday. The

brothers and sisters gather in the drawing-room and laugh and talk over the scheme of the visit to the seaside. Some women friends from the country called; also Treppy, the old nurse, extracting a promise from her to go and see her next day.

Then, after she had escaped to her own room, came Mr. Kenyon with his searching question as to when she had seen Browning last. With quick evasion she had been able to say he was there on Friday. On going away he put another question as to when she was to see Browning again, to which she could truthfully reply she did not know.

Would he beg forgiveness of her from his father and mother? She feels like a trespasser over the garden wall. And she had so hated having to take her wedding-ring off—he would have to put it on again for her.

With God's help, he replies, he will spend his life trying to give proof of his affection for her, and begs for information as to how to set about the approach to her father. He is prepared to make any "conceivable submission" to preserve her from the loss of his affection. Would his personal supplication be any use? Should he write? To Mr. Kenyon he would write, and thanks God that his life has borne flower and fruit so—his is a glorious life, for which he thanks God and her.

And he draws her attention to the Hand over it all. How this marriage of theirs was forced as they hesitated, was now done, and well done. How the precipitation simplified things—every moment of his life brought proof of the intervention of Providence.

"Dearest," is the terrified reply—"no letter must be sent till I am out of hearing of the reply. Tell no one till we are away—till the last moment." She would be "killed"—oh, it would be worse than he could possibly dream.

And is there any danger of the newspapers giving information? Oh, she is paralysed at the thought of writing this news to her father. He will not only be angry. She will be cast out once and for ever. She remembers his praise of her for her freedom from love affairs—his faith will be gone—all women will drop in his estimation because of her. She would put herself under his feet to be forgiven a little. He has great qualities, and she has been a sufferer from life so long—she will entreat him to remember that and pardon her this new affection. He would perhaps only answer, better that she had died long ago.

Arrangements are made for leaving by a boat starting



from Southampton at nine o'clock the following Saturday evening.

"My whole life," writes her husband, "shall be spent in trying to furnish such a proof of *my* affection; such a perfect proof—and perhaps vainly spent—but I will endeavour with God's help."

During the whole week no visit was paid by Browning, his utterly truthful lips refusing the lie of having to ask for "Miss Barrett"; in chivalrous wont he spared the harassed bride further anxiety so.

Everything is arranged by letter; an advertisement of their marriage arranged for insertion after their flight. Luggage is attended to by Wilson. The anxious man will be at Hodgson's, close at hand to 50, Wimpole Street; a cab will take them thence to the station.

One effort more, he writes, and may his return for it all make up for the strange failure of her father's towards her.

"Pray for me to-night," is the reply of the trembling bride—"pray for me and love me that I may have courage, feeling, both."

On September 19th, Mrs. Browning and her maid Wilson, carrying the little dog Flush, stole out of 50, Wimpole Street.

Robert Browning was at the place appointed—a book-seller's shop near by.

The journey was made to Southampton to catch the night boat to Havre; thence they travelled by train to Paris.

Here they met Mrs. Jameson—one of the few literary friends of Mrs. Browning—by fortunate chance, apparently, although she had been allowed to assume the secret of the poets, and that a secret marriage alone was possible. From Paris they travelled by easy stages to Pisa, and onwards to Florence, where their home was made. Here for fifteen years they lived and worked in that perfect union they had projected.

Mr. Barrett never forgave the marriage, never saw his daughter again, nor mentioned her name; her letters were returned to her unopened.

On March 9th, 1849, a son was born. A few days after, Browning's mother died; she did not live to hear of the birth of her grandchild: the end came unexpectedly. Of the sudden shock from joy at their child's birth to the profound grief at his mother's death, Mrs. Browning writes:

"My husband has been in the deepest anguish, and indeed, except for the courageous consideration of his sister, who wrote two letters of preparation, saying 'she was not well' and 'she was very ill,' when in fact all was over, I am frightened

to think what the result would have been to him. He has loved his mother as such passionate natures only can love, and I never saw a man so bowed down in an extremity of sorrow—never . . .

“Poor little babe, who was too much rejoiced over at first, fell away by a most natural recoil (even I felt it to be *most natural*) from all that triumph, but Robert is still very fond of him, and goes to see him bathed every morning, and walks up and down on the terrace with him in his arms.”—*From Mrs. Browning to Miss Browning.*

“My own strength has wonderfully improved, just as my medical friends prophesied—and it seems like a dream when I find myself able to climb the hills with Robert, and help him to lose himself in the forests. I have performed a great exploit—ridden on a donkey five miles deep into the mountains to an almost inaccessible volcanic ground not far from the stars. Robert on horseback, and Wilson and the nurse (with baby) on other donkeys—guides, of course. . . . You can scarcely image to yourself the retired life we live, or how we have retreated from the kind advances of the English society here.”—*From Letters to Miss Mitford.*

In 1856 kind Cousin Kenyon placed the poets beyond money anxieties by leaving them a legacy of eleven thousand pounds. He had also assisted them from the birth of their child with the gift of a hundred pounds a year.

## CHAPTER VI.

Established at Florence, Browning gloried in the domestic sanctuary into which he could glide from the disappointment his poetry brought.

In his dedication to E.B.B. he contrasted the fates of other searchers of the skies unaccompanied by woman's love.

In his dedication is the one word more that followed quickly on the return from his visits to her. He turned gladly from his rebuff in England to make a home in Italy he loved, freed from the armour of "dining and wining" he was to gird on again fifteen years later, bereft of those

"Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of  
Where I hush and bless myself in silence.

\* \* \*

God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures  
Boasts two soul sides, one to face the world with,  
One to show a woman when he loves her."

—To E.B.B.

It was in 1856 an Englishman asked the American Ambassador in Florence, "Is Mr. Browning an American?"

"Is it possible you ask me that; why there is not a village in the United States so small that they could not tell you that Robert Browning is an Englishman, and they wish he were an American."—*Life of Browning, Prof. Herford.*

"The excellent man hail-fellow-well-met," said the Florentines, "he a poet, no! she of course is a poetess."—*Oscar Browning, Memories.*

Mrs. Browning died unexpectedly on the night of June 29th, 1861. Of her death her husband wrote to Miss Hawthth:

"God took her to Himself as you would lift a sleeping child from a dark uneasy bed into your arms and the light."

"The friend who was nearest to Mr. Browning in this great and sudden sorrow," says Mrs. Sutherland Orr, "was Miss Blagden—Isa Blagden, as she was called by all her intimates.

"Miss Blagden went to Mr. Browning in his terrible desolation," says Lady Ritchie, "and did what little a friend could to help them. Day after day and for two or three nights, she watched by the stricken pair until she was relieved."

Upon the wall of " Casa Guidi " is the inscription :

" Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose woman's heart combined the wisdom of a wise man with the genius of a poet, and whose poems form a golden ring which joins Italy to England. The town of Florence ever grateful to her, has placed this epitaph to her memory."

Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie pictures Browning walking into the midst of a party in Florence where the hostess was reading his recently published work aloud :

" It was a lively excitable party, outstaying the usual hour of a visit ; questioning, puzzling, and discursive—a Browning society of the past, into the midst of which a door opens and Mr. Browning himself walks in, and the burst of voices is suddenly reduced to one single voice, that of the hostess, calling him to her side, and asking him to define his meaning. But he evaded the question, began to talk of something else—he never much cared to talk of his own poetry—and the Browning society dispersed."—*Recollections of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning.*

She writes of a visit to " Casa Guidi."

The peaceful home, the fireside where the logs are burning, " while the lady of that kind hearth is established in her safe corner with her little boy curled up by her side, the door opening and shutting meanwhile to the quick step of the master of the house."

The poem " By the Fireside" pictures the married pair in their home. It recalls the " moment one and infinite" when truth broke upon them.

" Oh, the little more, and how much it is  
and the little less, and what worlds away !

How the world is made for each of us !

How all we perceive and know in it

Tends to some moment's product thus,

When a soul declares itself—to wit,

By its fruit—the thing it does !

Be hate that fruit, or love that fruit,

It forwards the general deed of man,

And each of the Many helps to recruit

The life of the race by a general plan ;

Each living his own, to boot."

" The Guardian Angel " is the last glimpse of the poets in beautiful Italy, with its wonder of its spell of nature and wealth of art.

" Guercino drew this angel I saw teach  
(Alfred, dear friend)—that little child to pray.

We were at Fano, and three times we went  
To sit and see him in his chapel there,  
And drink his beauty to our soul's content  
—My angel with me too.

\*                      \*                      \*

O world, as God has made it ! All is beauty :  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.  
What further may be sought for or declared."

Next to "The Ring and the Book" the poem "Balaustion's Adventure" was written in the company of the spirit of his beloved E.B.B., at dull Warwick Crescent.

The house at Warwick Crescent was chosen because it was near the lodgings of Miss Arabel Barrett, who remained the life-long friend of Browning. The brothers took the father's side.

Life at Warwick Crescent bore hardly on Browning.

"The climate of England did not suit him," says Mrs. Orr, "each winter brought its searching attack of cold and cough; each summer reduced him to the state of nervous prostration or physical apathy, which rendered change imperative—his health and spirits rebounded at the first draught of foreign air."

After finishing his University course, for which his father prepared him, the profession of Art was chosen for the son. He studied at Antwerp and Paris, both modelling and painting. The bust of his father which he made, is in the collection of the Browning Settlement at Walworth; he painted the portrait of his father in his University gown. On the walls of the Browning Memorial Room at Browning Settlement, large landscape paintings of his are preserved.

The engagement ring given by Browning is among the Browning relics at the Settlement.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Had I never known Elizabeth," wrote Browning to Professor Corson, "I never could have written 'The Ring and the Book.'" Its opening confesses the mystic practice:

"Never may I commence my song, my due  
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,  
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—  
That still, despite the distance and the dark,  
What was, again may be."

That rage of the creative mind which conceived "The Ring and the Book" as the rapt artist paced the Terrace of Casa Guidi with his wife in the room beside him, was written out in the loneliness and discomfort of his widowed state and a climate contrasting painfully with that of the June night in Florence.

Browning reflected their own fate in the old Roman story. Amid all that bias of personal interest, of collective gossip; amid those interested points of view, in that welter of ignorant opinion; amid flagrant untruth, and the turmoil of callous, irresponsible public comment and gossip about a story the truth must lie. To search for truth, to make that truth live again as a further truth through creative art, to build another truth out of the complications of the human story is the artist's compulsion, he must shape for truth another truth:

"Able to take its own part as truth should,  
Sufficient, self-sustaining."

"So I wrought  
This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,  
And so, by one spirt, take away its trace  
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring."

The intention of the rescuing warrior priest animates him, all the glamour of the Italy he loved is there, all the apologetics of a "Vicar of Christ" are in the long soliloquy of the Pope holding the scales of justice on poor human happenings.

"Thence bit by bit I dug  
The lingot truth, that memorable day,  
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,  
Yes; but from something else surpassing that  
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,  
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file,  
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more."

“ There’s nothing in nor out o’ the world  
Good except truth ; yet this, the something else—  
What’s this, then, which proves good yet seems untrue ?  
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine  
That quickened, made the inertness malleable  
O’ the gold, was not mine—what’s your name for this ? ”  
“ The Ring and the Book ’ flings the first of Browning’s

great Apologiæ :

“ So, British Public, who may like me yet,  
(Marry and amen !) learn one lesson hence  
Of many which whatever lives should teach .  
This lesson, that our human speech is naught  
Our human estimation words and wind.  
. . . but here’s the plague  
That all this trouble comes of telling truth  
Which truth, by when it reaches him looks false,  
Seems to be just the thing it would supplant  
Nor recognizable by whom it left :  
While falsehood would have done the work of truth ”  
“ But if you rather be disposed to see  
In the result of the long trial here—  
This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise  
To innocence—any proof that truth  
May look for vindication from the world,  
Much will you have misread the signs I say.”

\* \* \*

“ Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss  
I’ the air, and catch again and twirl about  
By the crumpled vellum covers—pure crude fact  
Secreted from man’s life when hearts beat hard,  
And brains, high blooded, ticked two centuries since ? ”

\* \* \*

“ I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,  
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night  
After the day when—truth thus grasped and gained—  
The book was shut and done with and laid by.”

“ Was not Elisha once ?

Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse’ face.  
There was no voice, no hearing : he went in  
Therefore, and shut the door upon the twain,  
And prayed unto the Lord : and he went up  
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,  
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes  
Upon the eyes, his hands upon its hands,

And stretched him on the flesh ; the flesh waxed warm :  
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,  
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,  
And the eyes opened. 'Tis a credible feat  
With the right man and the way.

Enough of me !

The Book ! I turn its medicinale leaves  
In London now till, as in Florence erst,  
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,  
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,  
Letting me have my will again with these

—How title I the dead alive once more ?

So did this old woe fade from memory ;  
Till after, in the fullness of the days,  
I needs must find an ember yet unquenched  
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame."

In the record of the old yellow book, apparently fortuitously picked up, the mystic in Browning felt God's Hand, the humanist seized upon its material, the Artist shaped it into its form, the critic of life passed judgment and doubtless had the whole rounded and complete to its last ramifications during that afternoon and evening of fierce creative energy when the scattered moments of his past converged upon the story made for his art in the history of that crime judged centuries before: the wrong of the old and ruined Italian noble to the child Pompilia reputed to be so rich, heiress to the plebian pair, who, seeking to hold the child's fortune, burns with determination to get rid of the child wife in order to become owner of the fortune. By bad usage, by wily encouragements of one of his brothers to lead her to adultery, which she repels, by throwing her in the way of the priest he believes worldly and sensuous, working up evidence by fictitious letters from himself in the name of Caponsacchi, Guido laid his plans. The conspiracy fails, Pompilia cannot read and Caponsacchi simply holds the letters. Meanwhile she feels the wonder of life within her. After exhausting appeal to Guido, to his brothers, she appeals to Caponsacchi in her beating for freedom for herself and the unborn child. She demands protection from Caponsacchi, he, satisfied that the child wife is justified in her desire to get to Rome, believing her to be in danger from Guido, offers to help her escape : listening to the voice of conscience he plans for the flight. They are followed by Guido who hopes to catch an adulterous pair ; he finds but innocence and watchful protectiveness.



In her parent's home Pompilia is delivered of her child. Guido conspires with a criminal band to break in and murder her and get possession of his son to secure the inheritance ; she is wounded to death. Guido and his cut-throats are tried for the murder, Guido defending himself claiming privilege of priesthood.

Upon all this is the "superstructure" of the poet, judging and relating the facts of the two sides of public opinion, and the third party philosophically hearing the two dismissing the case with fine words of impartiality ; finally the words of Pompilia recorded as she lay dying in the Convent, the defence of Caponsacchi, the explanation of his conduct as called by his priestly moral position to save the child and her babe and affirm that all was purity itself in the occurrence.

Two lawyers take sides ; with apparent contempt Browning allows neither a true word on the case, special pleading and sophistry have their say, phrases and rhetoric evade truth : the case goes for Pompilia. Finally the Pope is appealed to by Guido on his right as priest.

In the long traversing of the welter of life of the Italy of long ago, the working principle, the prime urge of Browning's soul, the purpose of his art from first to last, is displayed—the soul's urge for truth is Art's reason of being, and Love is the password to its domain, the key to eternal life :

"For life with all it yields

Of joy, and woe, and hope, and fear,  
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love—  
How life might be, hath been indeed, and is."

"It is the glory and the good of art," the poet writes, concluding "The Ring and the Book" :

"That art remains the one way possible  
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.  
How look a brother in the face and say,  
'Thy right is wrong : eyes hast thou, yet art blind.  
Thine ears are stuffed and stopped despite their length ?  
And oh ! the foolishness thou countest faith !'  
But art—wherein man nowise speaks to men,  
Only to mankind—art may tell a truth  
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,  
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,  
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

\* \* \* \* \*

It lives,

If precious be the soul of man to man."

"If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,

Render all duty which good ring should do,  
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship—  
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,  
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)  
Linking our England to his Italy."

*The Ring and the Book (concluding lines).*

Written six years after Mrs. Browning's death, through Art Browning justifies his flight with his bride from tyranny :

"Here's the exceptional conduct that should claim

To be exceptionally judged on rules

Which, understood, make no exception here."

All the heart break at death's invasion, and his soul's defiance are here :

"No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead !

That erect form, flashing brow fulgent eye,

That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers !)

. . . that was not the last

O' the lady !"

The poem "The Ring and the Book" is dedicated to the memory of Mrs Browning ; it carries a scroll to her memory and spiritual presence graved in the ring :

"O lyric Love, half angel and half bird

And all a wonder and a wild desire—

Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,

Took sanctuary within the holier blue,

And sang a kindred soul out to his face.

\* \* \*

Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help !

Never may I commence my song, my due

To God who best taught song by gift of thee,

Except with bent head and beseeching hand—

That still, despite the distance and the dark,

What was, again may be ; some interchange

Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,

Some benediction anciently thy smile :

Never conclude, but raising hand and head

Thither were eyes that cannot reach, yet yearn

For all hope, all sustainment, all reward."

In urge of the Spirit of Truth, which is Art's life blood, Browning sent out the long piece of truth telling in "Fifine-at-the-Fair."

"It was not without misgiving Mr. Browning published "Fifine-at-the-Fair," wrote Mrs. Orr, "but many years were to pass before he realised the kind of criticism to which it had exposed him."

Is he inconstant to his wife's memory because he still loves life : he questions in the Prologue :

"I never shall join its flight,  
For nought buoys flesh in air ;  
If it touch the sea—good-night !  
Death sure and swift waits there.

"But sometimes when the weather  
Is blue, and warm waves tempt  
To free oneself of tether,  
And try a life exempt

"From worldly noise and dust,  
In the sphere which overbrims  
With passion and thought—why, just  
Unable to fly, one swims !

"By passion and thought upborne,  
One smiles to oneself—'They fare  
Scarce better, they need not scorn  
Our sea, who live in the air !'

"Emancipate through passion  
And thought, with sea for sky,  
We substitute, in a fashion,  
For heaven—poetry !"

The body of the poem is apologia for his apparent inconstancy to his dual seeing in his presentment of it through Art: a long drawn out argument for his compromise of poetry by which to effect spiritual entry into minds by subterfuge :

"Tis man you seek to seal  
Your very own ? Resolve, for first step, to discard  
Nine-tenths of what you are ! To make you must be marred.  
To raise your race must stoop, to teach them aught must learn  
Ignorance, meet half-way what most you hope to spurn  
I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate the thought  
And vulgarise the word, and see the deed be brought  
To look like nothing done with any such intent.  
As teach men—though perchance it teach by accident !  
So may you master men : assured that if you show  
One point of mastery, departure from the low  
And level—head or heart revolt at long disguise,  
Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities,  
If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word  
Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,  
His chance of capture's gone."

Make survey and tell me—was it worth  
You acted part so well, went on all fours upon earth  
The live-long day, brayed, belled, and all to bring to pass  
That stags should deign to eat hay when winter stints them  
grass ?

“Examine and report—a brother, sure enough,  
Disports him in brute-guise ; for skin is truly skin,  
Horns, hoofs are hoofs and horns, and all outside and in,  
Is veritable beast, whom fellow-beast resigned  
May follow.”

“What though I seem to go before ? ’tis you that lead, /  
I follow what I see so plain—the general mind.  
Projected pillar-wise, flame kindled by the kind,  
Which dwarfs the unit—me—to insignificance !  
Halt you, I stop forthwith—proceed, I too advance.”

“But you have to deal with womankind ?  
Abandon stratagem for strategy ! Cast quite  
The vile disguise away, try truth clean opposite  
Such creep-and-crawl, stand forth all man, and, might it  
chance,

Somewhat of angel too !—what e’er inheritance,  
Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,  
Lay claim to ! Your best self revealed at uttermost—,

\* \* \* \* \*

“Here you start no pompous stag  
Who condescends be snared, with toss of horn, and brag  
Of bray, and ramp of hoof ; you have not to subdue  
The foe through letting him imagine he snares you !

Epilogue reveals a very tired man, pain-racked and weary  
of keeping house alone. Time drags, neighbours irritate,  
street sounds annoy, scenes are revolting, doors flap and dark  
fancies strike despair almost to a wish that life were over and  
done with, and flesh but a carcass.

Memory of the beloved E.B.B. plays its tricks of comfort  
of her spiritual presence :

‘ Nay but there’s a decency required ! quoth She ! ’  
‘ What, and is it really you again ? quoth I. ’  
‘ I again, what else did you expect ? quoth She. ’  
‘ Ah but if you knew how time has dragged, days nights. ’  
‘ And was I so better off up there ? quoth She. ’

\* \* \*

I end with—Love is all and death is nought ! quoth She. ’

In "Balaustion's Adventure" memory plays round the passion of Miss Barrett for the Greeks.

"Balaustion" utters the feminism of Miss Barrett :

"I always asked 'Why may not woman act.'

Nay, wear the comic visor just as well."

"Do you conceive the quite new Comedy  
When laws allow? Laws only let girls dance,  
Pipe, posture—above all Elaphionize,  
Provided they keep decent—that is dumb."

In "Aristophanes' Apology" indignation is defended as power, as an uprush of truth that does the work for soul, using its language in protection of the love spirit :

"Hate! Honest, earnest and directest hate!"

In the poem are words to "Balaustion," recalling his lyric love as a child divining :

"When all at once, large-looming from his wave,  
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge  
A sea-worn face sad as mortality,  
Divine with yearning after fellowship.  
He rose but breast-high. So much God she saw ;  
So much she sees now, and does reverence."

—*Aristophanes' Apology.*

"I know the poetess who graved in gold  
Among her glories that shall never fade,  
This style and title for Euripides  
The Human with his droppings of warm tears."

"And all came—glory of the golden verse,  
And passion of the picture, and that fine  
Frank outgush of the human gratitude  
Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse—  
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps  
Away from you friends, while I told my tale,  
—It all came of this play that gained no prize!  
Why crown whom Zeus had crowned in soul before."

—*Balaustion's Adventure.*

"Aristophanes' Apology" is Balaustion's second adventure of the lyric girl who knew with the Greeks that "poetry is power."

"—So works the spell

The enthusiastic mood which marks a man  
Muse—mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse  
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,  
As lark emballed by its own crystal song."

Here is the Apologia of Browning for his art, that rush of words, that play of imagination, that profusion of fact through

which to display fancy ; that discursive thought which was his necessity, says the parable of the Ethiopian in "Sordello."

"Do you believe, when I aspired in youth  
I made no estimate of power at all ;  
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class  
Of fighters I might claim to join."

In "Aristophanes' Apology," amid the medley of the word, is apologia to lyric Balaustion for the method he used for exercising :

"That originative force  
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life  
Which underlying law, seems lawlessness  
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,  
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones."

"Balaustion's fixed regard  
Can strip the proper Aristophanes  
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style  
His accidents."

"Balaustion ! Here are very many words  
All to portray one moment's rush of thought."  
Trust on, trust ever, trust to end—in truth."

"Anyhow, I have followed happily  
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect  
Since come to see you, I am shown—myself."

The poems "Pheidippides" and "Echetlos" return to the classic ground his poetess made her own. Here is the Battle of Marathon from two points, and the mystery of the great God, Pan, which Miss Barrett made lament for. In the poem "Pan and Luna" Browning declares himself with Virgil in the Legend of Sun and Moon.

Between "The Ring and the Book," and "Balaustion's Adventure" came the poems athwart which Mrs. Browning's shadow falls, "Mr. Sludge, the Medium" and "Prince Hohenstiel Schwangau, Saviour of Society."

Upon the subject of Home, the Medium, and Napoleon III., the wedded poets agreed to differ in that perfect union which allows liberty of opinion to the other. Browning thought the Medium cheated, Mrs. Browning thought imposture was impossible. She saw in Napoleon III. the saviour of his country, he mistrusted him.

That his wife's faith in the Medium distressed him, that they did not see eye to eye on the subject of Napoleon III., was of small importance in that perfect tolerance of the perfect



married life. At this time he wrote a Napoleon poem, he confessed, which remained in his desk. If a thing hurt him, he declared in the Correspondence, it had to be written out.

A mortal hurt at the beginning of what proved his last year of life, was written out. Pain danced in its intolerable agony on the grave of Edward Fitzgerald, who had heaped scorn on the grave of his beloved.

"I was ever a fighter," said "Prospice."

At the end of the year the last fight was put to the test.

"For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,

The black minute's at end,

And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,

Shall dwindle, shall blend,

Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,

Then a light, then thy breast,

O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,

And with God be the rest."

The Laureateship passed Browning by.

"For his opposition to Gladstone's Home Rule Bill Browning paid the penalty.—*Life of Browning by Edward Dowden.*

The Oxford M.A. was conferred on him in the summer of 1866. The Honorary Fellowship of Balliol College in the autumn.

"It was the last wish of his father," wrote Mr. Barrett Browning, "that the portrait, painted by me, in his Oxford gown, together with the ring of his wife, which he habitually wore on his watch chain after her death, should be given to Balliol. It was of Etruscan gold with the letters A.E.I. on it."

"The ring and bound volumes of the manuscript poems together with the old yellow book, were taken to Balliol by me in 1890," writes Mrs. Barrett Browning.

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At Banquets of State to which Browning was bidden in later life, the honorary distinction of the Universities was his insignia when Orders and Decorations were commanded.

"Who is the guest in the scarlet cloak at the foot of the table?" questioned the Persian Monarch of the American Ambassador.

"That is our poet in his University gown!"

"It is not at the foot of the table we place our poets," answered the Persian.—*Reminiscences of Choate.*